

BATTLETECH™ LEGENDS



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LEGENDS NEVER DIE

Across the centuries, the fate of the Inner Sphere changed time and again with the actions of one MechWarrior and one 'Mech fighting at the crux of history. Their stories became legends passed down through the years, and now these legends and their 'Mechs stand revealed as never before.

BattleTech: Legends depicts fifty-two of the universe's most famous—and infamous—MechWarriors and their 'Mechs from every era of *BattleTech* including the upcoming ilClan era. Each entry includes gorgeous full-color portraits of the character and camo specs for their machines, and delves into their battle history as a MechWarrior to reveal all-new details never before published. Finally, each era section kicks off with all-new fiction by some of *BattleTech's* own legendary authors!



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—Ray Arrastia

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Special thanks also goes to Anthony Scroggins & Dale Eadeh for their 3D modeling assistance. The resulting product looks absolutely amazing, and is a stunning body of work. Thank you for helping to establish a whole new era of visuals which bring *BattleTech* to life!

Dale Eadeh would like to thank his wife Natasha, who put an undue amount of time and sweat into this book.

Randall N. Bills would like to thanks the hundreds of amazing *BattleTech* artists and authors spanning nearly four decades. This book stands on the shoulders of giants. To the tens of thousands of MechWarriors around the world...may the siren song of the cockpit always call your name. Thank you.

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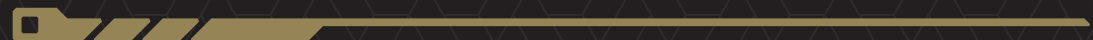
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BATTLETECH IS A UNIVERSE DEFINED BY MECHWARRIORS AND THE TITANIC WAR MACHINES THEY RIDE INTO BATTLE. MORE THAN THE UNIVERSE-SWEEPING POLITICS, MORE THAN THE LARGE-SCALE WARS AND CONFLICTS, THE PUREST *BATTLETECH* STORIES COME DOWN TO ONE MECHWARRIOR AND THEIR 'MECH FIGHTING TO CHANGE THE COURSE OF HISTORY—WHETHER FOR GOOD OR ILL.

***BATTLETECH: LEGENDS* SHINES A SPOTLIGHT ON THE UNIVERSE'S MOST NOTABLE MECHWARRIORS, LARGER-THAN-LIFE PERSONALITIES WHO HELPED SHAPE THE UNIVERSE IN WHICH THEY LIVE. IN ADDITION TO AN EXAMINATION OF THEIR LIVES, EACH ENTRY INCLUDES ALL-NEW ART OF BOTH THE INDIVIDUAL AND A 'MECH INTIMATELY TIED TO THEIR HISTORY—IN SOME CASES, THE FIRST TIME ONE OR BOTH HAVE EVER BEEN DEPICTED IN ANY OFFICIAL *BATTLETECH* PRODUCT.**

RATHER THAN PROVIDE AN IN-UNIVERSE INTRODUCTION FOR *LEGENDS*, AS WE DO FOR MANY *BATTLETECH* PRODUCTS, WE WANTED TO USE THIS SPACE TO EXPLAIN SOME OF THE GOALS OF THE BOOK YOU HOLD IN YOUR HANDS AND PROVIDE SOME CONTEXT FOR THE CHOICES WE MADE.

MECHWARRIORS, ONE AND ALL

Some are more famous for their actions in the political arena, or accomplished far more in the halls of power than they ever did in a cockpit. But without exception, each character detailed in *Legends* is a MechWarrior. This book is not intended as a comprehensive encyclopedia of every major character across *BattleTech's* long history—such a volume would be a truly massive undertaking, if it were even possible in print form. Instead, we focused solely on characters who were known to be MechWarriors and spent some amount of time under a neurohelmet.

Taken as a whole, this focus created what may seem at first like omissions—Devlin Stone is included, but his diabolical opposite number in the Jihad era, The Master, is not. The explanation is simple: while Stone's *Atlas II*, *Phantom*, and its skeletal visage were iconic in

their era, the twisted man once called Thomas Marik was not known to be a MechWarrior. Rather than attempt to create BattleMech experience out of whole cloth for characters who never possessed it before, we set those characters aside and focused on those who proved themselves as warriors. (Yes, even you, Katherine Steiner-Davion.) The final list of characters included in *Legends* was the subject of spirited debate among *BattleTech's* senior developers, but on the grounds of whether or not they were a MechWarrior, each is defensible.

Rather than becoming a constraint, this focus actually created some interesting new opportunities. In several cases, notable characters from *BattleTech* lore were said to be MechWarriors, but their time in the cockpit was never explored in much depth. In *Legends*, we finally shine a light on the battlefield experience of characters such as Romano Liao—

stories of her time as Chancellor of the Capellan Confederation have been told, but what was she like at the controls of her 'Mech? How might her "eccentric" personality have been reflected in the way she led her troops on the battlefield?

This desire to add new threads to the existing tapestry of *BattleTech* is reflected throughout *Legends*.

THE ART OF THE NEW

From the very start, the desire to create all-new, stunning art was at the heart of *Legends*' development. In these pages, you will find completely original, full-color portraits of each personality, some of whom have never been depicted in such detail before. Likewise, each of their BattleMechs is rendered in full-color illustrations displaying parade or camouflage schemes perfect for your next miniature painting project.

Through the years, *BattleTech* has been defined by entrancing works of art gracing the covers and interiors of its products. But it's fair to say that our corps of artists is as strong as it's ever been, and we couldn't wait to turn them loose on some of the universe's most notable personalities and machines, especially those who have never had their due. We think you'll agree that the work they produced is jaw-dropping.

In some cases, the BattleMech included with a character's entry is the one you would expect—Natasha Kerensky is in her *Warhammer*, and Alaric Ward's *Savage Wolf* is fully detailed. But, for the most part, we wanted to keep the BattleMechs depicted in these pages within the pool of 'Mechs redesigned as part of the *BattleTech: Clan Invasion* crowdfunding campaign, and to depict BattleMechs which had multiple pilots over the decades only once. (One exception? The *Mackie*, mother of all BattleMechs.)

Once again, what might seem like a limitation in fact opened up some interesting storytelling opportunities. If Kai Allard-Liao is accompanied by an image of *Yen-Lo-Wang*, what else might his father, Justin Allard, have piloted? What 'Mech would Danai Liao-Centrella choose when the time came for her to step up as a senior battlefield commander?

In addition, each era section begins with an all-new piece of fiction produced by notable *BattleTech* authors—some of whom are legends in their own right. Just like the character entries, their stories detail never-before-told events from that era featuring some of its legends.

For the character entries, our writers were encouraged to find answers to previously unanswered questions, and explore areas of characters' history never before detailed. The life of any legend is full and complex, and virtually every entry in this book includes some all-new information, ranging from a never-before-revealed nickname for their 'Mech, up to, in a handful of cases, the previously-unknown details of how their lives ended.

These latter stories were tough to tell, but it is a central tenet of the *BattleTech* universe that the end comes for everyone, even legends. Difficult as it was to finally lay some of these characters to rest, it's entirely appropriate—because the future is at hand.

THE ILCLAN COMETH

At the time of this writing, *BattleTech* stands on the cusp of an all-new time period: the ilClan era. The seventh era of *BattleTech* begins in 2021, but we couldn't wait to introduce you—and re-introduce you—to a handful of characters who will help shape this exciting new chapter of our story. For those wondering, the *Legends* entries cover all information up to the last moment of *Shattered Fortress* and the first moments of the novel *Hour of the Wolf*—1 January 3151.

The ilClan era section of *Legends* serves to set the stage for these new stories. Some characters, such as Julian Davion or Alaric Ward, you've come to know rather well. Several have been off-stage for a few years, but will play significant roles in the coming era. Others are just about to take to that stage for the first time—they may not be legends yet, but they will be.

THE STORY CONTINUES...

We hope you enjoy *BattleTech: Legends* as much as we enjoyed creating it. This book was a labor of love for a truly talented team of artists, writers, fact-checkers and developers, and served as a powerful reminder of the allure of *BattleTech*'s rich history. Whether they're front and center in the upcoming era of *BattleTech*, or left the stage many years ago, the legends in these pages are all a living, breathing part of the universe we love so much.

Because, like the man said:

**HEROES GET REMEMBERED,
BUT LEGENDS NEVER DIE.**

THE STAR L

EAGUE ERA

SOMETHING TO PROVE

CHARLES KINCAID

MSK - 5S MACKIE

ALEKSANDR KERENSKY

ON1 - K-ORION

ELIZABETH HAZEN

HGN - 732B HIGHLANDER

JEROME WINSON

MAD - 2R MARAUDER



SOMETHING TO PROVE

MICHAEL J. CIARAVELLA

FORT BARBADOS

STYX

TERRAN HEGEMONY

12 JUNE 2443

"Colonel, you don't have to do this!"

Colonel Charles Kincaid ignored the strident voice and kept his pace even as he walked toward the immense hangar in the distance, heedless of the misting rain that seemed omnipresent over the last week. Beside him, Major Elliot Pullman attempted to keep up with his commander's long-legged strides, hardly bothering to hide how he felt about being out in such miserable weather.

"I think we both know I do." Kincaid replied, knowing Pullman wouldn't relent unless he said something. "My men are going up against enemy forces, and my place is at their side."

As the commander of the 801st Heavy Armored Regiment of the Terran Hegemony, Kincaid held responsibility for the defense of Styx, a Hegemony planet perilously close to the border of the Draconis Combine. So, when an unidentified JumpShip disgorged a DropShip at the system's nadir jump point, he had ordered his unit to full alert. When the DropShip landed fifteen kilometers from the city of Barbados, Kincaid had immediately prepared his armor forces to move out, but he was also eager to use the new equipment he'd just received from the Hegemony, a brand-new technology he'd helped test back on Terra.

The new technology, known as the BattleMech, was the brainchild of a top-secret Hegemony Research

and Development program that refined Professor Gregory Atlas' earlier WorkMech breakthrough with cutting-edge myomer muscle technology and upgraded neural interfacing between man and machine. The Hegemony now produced 100-ton war machines that could fight like armored knights of old, towering over the battlefield and equipped with advanced technology to dominate modern warfare.

Kincaid didn't need to look at the other man to sense the glare Pullman was giving him. "You are their commanding officer, sir! Your place should be in the command center, or in the cockpit of a fighter if you must...but this..."

The other man's voice trailed off as his commander stopped, a knowing smile on his lips. *There it is.*

"You're concerned about me taking out the BattleMechs, aren't you?"

This time, the younger officer did not try to conceal the concern written on his face from the very beginning. "They are untried technology, Charlie."

Kincaid was careful to note the change of address. Elliot Pullman and Charles Kincaid had grown up together on Killbourn, and when Charles had been commissioned into the Star League military, he hadn't hesitated for a moment to bring his good friend along with him. Elliot had stood by his side through multiple conflicts that would have broken lesser men, and never hesitated to have his friend's back.

Unfortunately, it also provided a rift here, when Elliott thought his friend was making a terrible mistake.

"Of all people, you know that's not true. How many times have you gone over my BattleROM footage?"

Pullman sighed heavily, an indulgence he never would have allowed in front of others. "You know I don't have any doubts about your skills, Charlie, but you've trained in fighters for years! How many hours have you spent in the cockpit of these things?"

"If I was in a fighter, I'd be facing our enemies with technology they've seen," Kincaid replied. "You know the Kuritan hardware is nearly as good as what the Hegemony can field, and if we go against them one-on-one, we're going to lose good men. When we take them on with our new BattleMechs, however —"

"It's too soon." The other man replied. "I know you wish it were otherwise, but the technicians are still working the bugs out of the system. Remember the targeting glitch last week? You nearly took out the communication shack."

Kincaid took a moment to look appropriately abashed. His friend was right on that level, at least. During the training exercises with his first lance of BattleMechs, the targeting sensors on his *Mackie* had suffered an unexplained glitch, and his autocannon fire had shot wide, nearly fifteen meters off from where he had been aiming. The training rounds were not penetrators, but they had left ugly divots in the steel walls of the communications shack, and nearly caused one of the technicians to wet themselves. Still, they had tracked down the issue, and there had been no repeats on the day since, for his BattleMech or any of the others.

"I know what you're saying, Elliot, but the cost in lives will never be a minor consideration for me. If I can send a tank crew of three with a fifty percent chance of them being killed or injured, or a single warrior with a thirty percent chance, the choice is simple."

"But why do *you* have to go with them?" Pullman replied. "Send the lance if you must, but there's no reason you have to go yourself."

"I am their commanding officer and the most experienced MechWarrior on-planet." Kincaid replied. "How can I send my men if I am not willing to shoulder the risk myself?"

Pullman seemed to consider this for a moment, but something on the other man's face must have

tipped him off that there was more to it. "Is that really the reason?"

Kincaid felt his face go cold. "Do you think there is another?"

Pullman spoke carefully, clearly seeing that the other man was getting sensitive about the discussion. "Charlie, we have both heard what some of the men have been saying..."

"About the test run." He replied simply.

"Yes." Elliot replied. "There is a lot of resistance to new technology at the best of times, but the way these new BattleMechs have been rushed into production... it makes some of the men nervous. They know their tanks. They have fought in those tanks. They have sweat, bled, and many of their friends have died in those tanks. It is a very different way of battle than what you are looking at, and they are understandably a little skeptical."

Kincaid heard everything his friend was saying, but also knew there was more to it. "They don't think the test was fair."

Although his friend's expression did not change, he instantly saw the confirmation in the other man's eyes. Kincaid had heard the whispers in the O-Club: that he had been given the test mission for the new *Mackie* due to his family connections with the Cameron ruling line. Everyone knew the new BattleMech program was the darling of the Hegemony elite, and it was whispered that the project had been secretly deemed too large to fail.

Rumors abounded that the Camerons had intentionally neutered the Merkava tanks that had opposed him, to allow his single BattleMech to make the best showing it could for the assembled members of the Hegemony. Unlike the original parameters of the test, the tanks had been remote-controlled, ostensibly for safety reasons, but the change in testing parameters made many wonder if there had been an intentional attempt to soft-soap the testing procedures. The BattleROM footage had shown a delay in response that a fully trained tank crew could have eliminated, but the judges of the test had deemed the delay within the normal operating specifications for the tanks and let it stand. Still, the

whole thing had left a sour taste in many mouths, both in the rank and file of the Hegemony military, as well as the Hegemony military contractors who had a vested interest in seeing the *Mackie* fail.

"They don't know what to think," Pullman said cautiously. "You know as well as I do just how much some distrust the elite families. The fact that we are from two of them makes them nervous enough. You know better than I do that many of them think we got handed our commissions with silver spoons. When they see us getting the opportunity to use equipment that they have not yet, untested items that are just beginning to see their service life..." He shrugged. "They don't know what to think."

"But don't they realize what this means?" Kincaid asked, throwing up his hands with disgust that he would never let any of his other officers see. "This is going to change the galaxy! A single BattleMech can take on an entire lance of tanks *and beat them!* We can do so while risking a third of the lives, with a greater array of tactical options! How can they not see that?" Something in the other man's expression must have given him away, for Kincaid gave his friend a harsh look. "Or do they not have faith in my ability?"

"No one is doubting your ability, Charlie," Pullman replied, a little too quickly. "It might just be better for someone else to take the lead on this one..."

"You don't think I can do it." Kincaid replied, the accusation coming out more sharply than he intended.

For a moment, he thought his friend was going to deny it, but for all his caution Elliot Pullman was no coward. "No...I'm worried that you feel you have to."

Kincaid stared at his friend for a long moment. "And you won't be there at my back?"

The other man reared back as if struck. It was a little-known secret that Pullman himself had attempted to get into the BattleMech training program with his friend, but an inner-ear issue kept his sense of balance from achieving the connections a BattleMech's delicate neural interface required.

It meant he would be relegated to tanks for the rest of his life, where the balance issue would be less of a problem. It had also caused a small, but noticeable division between the close friends, especially when Major Amanda Cunningham had been promoted to lieutenant colonel to take the second seat in the new lance of BattleMechs, a position Kincaid knew his friend had coveted.

Kincaid instantly regretted his words as quickly as they slipped out. "Elliot—"

"I withdraw my objections, Colonel." The shorter man snapped to parade rest, his eyes locked forward. "With your permission, I will ensure your support forces are ready from Command and Control."

Kincaid instantly wanted to say something, anything to try to take back the harsh words he had used, but a single glance at his oldest friend told him there would be no chance of forgiveness for the immediate future. Instead, he nodded. "Carry on, Major."

The shorter man snapped into a sharp turn, and headed back purposefully toward the C&C. Kincaid watched him for several long moments, but the other man never turned back.

Sighing heavily, Kincaid faced the hangar once more, and continued his trek, feeling far more alone than he had expected.



The process to start up the MSK-5S *Mackie* was a careful, tedious series of systems tests, but eventually everything flashed green on his board.

Glancing out his cockpit viewport, he saw his three fellow MechWarriors, each in their own Mackie, all of whom had completed their startup routines and were waiting for his orders.

Taking a deep breath, he switched on the comm. "All right, team. We have a company of raiders attempting to attack the city of Barbados, probably for a scoop-and-shoot run through the high-rent portions of the area. Our forces in the city have informed us that they are not running transponders,

but the prevailing thought is that they are from the Draconis Combine."

Kincaid knew that the others would not be surprised by this. Ever since the Combine's formation, the ruling body had nurtured a rising distrust of Cameron's Terran Hegemony. "We're going to be point, with Major Pullman sending additional conventional reinforcements as time permits, but we have the chance to get in there and do some serious damage before they think we can respond. Any questions?"

"Composition of enemy force?" The voice came from his XO, Lt. Colonel Amanda Cunningham.

"Initial reports indicate a company's worth of armor and several squads of mechanized infantry," he replied. "They have us in numbers, but we have them in quality. Not to mention that once the major gets reinforcements there, we won't need to worry about it." He tried to remain upbeat and focused, but he didn't mention that they didn't know if the Combine forces also had reinforcements coming.

With all of their questions answered, he gave the order to move out, and cycled his BattleMech up to a fast walk. The rain began misting his cockpit glass the instant he cleared the hangar doors, but his visibility wasn't significantly impaired. Still, while his BattleMech had the ability to run at a much faster speed, he did not want to push the unfamiliar tech too quickly, especially with the ground already a swampy, muddy mess from a week's worth of bad weather.

As they approached the outskirts of the city of Barbados, Kincaid received a quick update from Pullman. He confirmed that the enemy forces did seem to be Kuritan, and the tanks appeared to be variants of the Merkavas that Kincaid had faced during his test run.

"Contact!" Cunningham's voice came over the comm as a pair of smoke plumes rose in the distance. "It looks like we have a pair of outriders."

Kincaid instantly recognized the smoke as incoming missile fire, and ordered his lance to go evasive.

"I will take care of them," Kincaid replied. "Amanda, continue on toward the city with the rest of the lance."

At the moment, the only defenders Barbados had were some infantry forces posted at the barracks. They would have great difficulty with the armor, and the heavy weaponry the rest of his lance could provide might be decisive.

Lt. Colonel Cunningham was too well trained to argue with him, but her displeasure was clear in her reply. "Aye aye, sir."

"You've got this, Amanda. Give 'em hell!"

With that parting sentiment, Kincaid rushed at the two tanks, attempting to get under their effective missile envelope, feeling the occasional shudder as they landed hits from their autocannons. Sporting single LRM 15 missile launchers, he knew he could halve their offensive firepower by closing in, where he would also maintain his own advantage. His weapons were more potent at long range, but he could take far more punishment.

Or so he hoped.

As he approached, Kincaid lit into the first tank with his PPC, causing the hellish energies to scour armor from its front glacis armor and coring deep into its hull. He followed up with a quick burst from his autocannon, the armor-piercing rounds cutting into the armor and lancing into one tread. He watched with grim satisfaction as the damaged tread came off, and he changed his focus to the second tank. While the first was still barely combat-capable, it had just become a pillbox, while Kincaid's own mobility was undiminished.

Switching his weapons interlock, he fired his large laser at the second tank, hitting the turret underneath the LRM launcher. The turret swiveled toward him, and a stream of autocannon shells struck the 'Mech in the torso, the staccato rumble of impacts filling his cockpit. Such a strike might have been devastating to a fellow tank, but the immense behemoth seemed to just shrug it off.

In an instant, Kincaid had closed the distance, and reached out again with his autocannon and laser. He knew he had to be very careful of his heat. The *Mackie* mounted seventeen heat sinks to control the inferno created by firing the weapons and moving, but he could soon overwhelm the system and risk some of the BattleMech's actuators locking up on him.

The paired weapons had a devastating effect at short range, however, cutting through the side armor and straight into the tank itself. He saw a small flash light up inside the tank, and the turret froze mid-motion, almost seeming to droop as the tank lost all control from inside.

Kincaid didn't have any time to appreciate the moment, however, as his *Mackie* shook from the impact of multiple autocannon rounds on his left torso. Glancing at his secondary screen, he noted the arrival of two other tanks, and they were closing fast.

The tank that had not fired triggered its own missiles and autocannon, and moments later he was thrown around in his cockpit, his neurohelmet jabbing painfully into his collarbone as he attempted to ride out the attack. He glanced down to see his left torso had taken more damage, turning the armor wireframe for the location bright red, as well as showing damage to the head and the right arm.

Straightening to his full height, Kincaid turned on the first of the approaching tanks and lashed out with both his PPC and his autocannon. The man-made lightning of the PPC blast was underscored by the thunder of the autocannon as it cut into the turret of the tank, shattering the armor and leaving it a tattered mess.

Unfortunately for Kincaid, this time the weapons fire didn't penetrate the interior, and the tank unleashed its full array of weaponry at him. Missiles struck all over his front, shaking the 'Mech again, and autocannon rounds cut into his center torso, right above the *Mackie's* gyro. A second burst of autocannon fire came from the other tank, cutting into his left leg, with missiles peppering his left side.

The sudden abundance of incoming fire momentarily overwhelmed his sense of balance, and the BattleMech fell forward, carving an ugly divot into the ground. It took all of Kincaid's willpower to focus on staying conscious, and he quickly tried to remember the best method to get the massive BattleMech back on his feet.

Propping himself up with one barreled arm, Kincaid managed to get the *Mackie* back up into a hunched position, and lashed out with his autocannon at the tank he had already damaged, managing to follow

up with his large laser. The laser wasted itself on the forward armor, but the autocannon capitalized on the damage from earlier, ripping the turret completely from the tank. Without its weapons compliment, the tank tried to retreat, but bogged down in the muddy quagmire of the field.

The other tank, however, was undeterred. It fired again, and this time the damage cut deep into the *Mackie's* left torso, ripping through the armor and taking the left arm off with it. Once again, the unbalanced 'Mech nearly went to the ground, but this time Kincaid was able to hold it up through sheer force of will. Maintaining his feet, he closed with the tank, getting first within its minimum range, and then within the turning radius of its turret.

Pulling back one leg, Kincaid let fly with a massive kick, caving in the side of the tank. The sheer force the myomers of the 100-ton BattleMech could exert were astounding, with the blow having the secondary effect of completely ripping off the side track, although the shattered hulk that had once been a proud war machine would never need it again.

Taking a moment to catch his breath, Kincaid searched the area for any additional threats, but found none. Two of the tanks had been completely destroyed, with the crew from the third still trying to escape from what was formerly the upper hatch. The first tank he had attacked appeared to be abandoned, as he did not see any sign of its crew.

Activating his comm, he received confirmation from Lieutenant Colonel Cunningham that they had reached the city and were actively engaged with Kuritan forces. While the stress of battle was clear in her voice, she also remained confident that they were turning the tide, and he assured her he would be there shortly. Throttling up his *Mackie* to a full run, he headed toward the city.

By the time he arrived, however, the battle was already over. Apparently, Cunningham had taken his instructions to heart, and had sent the rest of the lance deep into the force of Kuritan tanks. Of the eight, seven were burning hulks, while the last was in full retreat, loaded down with infantrymen whose own vehicles were also in flames.

The city remained intact, and none of the warehouses targeted by the raiders had even been approached by the Kuritans. Kincaid felt a sharp stab of pride as he looked out at the scene, and he made sure there was considerable documentation to show the effectiveness of the BattleMech experiment. His lance had defended the city incredibly effectively, and he could hear the pride in Cunningham's voice when he told her so.

Returning to the fort at a comfortable pace, he was surprised to find Pullman waiting for him when he descended from the gantry. His friend gave Kincaid a companionable nod and held out a brightly colored bottle.

"What's this?"

"A peace offering." Pullman said, handing the taller man a cold Vita-Orange sports drink. "From what the doctors say, MechWarriors may be especially susceptible to dehydration after long periods in the cockpit. I wouldn't want my commanding officer to faint or anything."

Kincaid nodded, and gave his friend a small smile. "Thank you, but I think I'm the one who probably should be apologizing." He sighed. "You were right—I *was* doing this for the wrong reasons. I had something to prove, both to the others and myself, and I shouldn't have taken it out on you. I hope you can forgive me."

Elliot shrugged. "Water under the bridge." He regarded his commanding officer carefully. "But did you learn what you needed to know?"

Kincaid took a brief moment, and the two of them looked at the mighty BattleMech that stood sentry behind him. In that moment, Kincaid did not doubt for an instant that the future of the Inner Sphere would be built on BattleMech technology, and that he had just witnessed the first steps towards a grand future.

"I think I have," he finally replied.

"Well, at least everyone else will know it soon, too." Elliot replied, but frowned when his friend shook his head.

"Why bother? People are going to believe what they want to believe either way. I don't have anything to prove to them." Charles smiled at his friend. "Don't mention me in the report."

"What should I say?"

"That a lance of BattleMechs from the 801st Heavy Armored Regiment, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Amanda Cunningham, repelled a Kuritan raiding force that sought to pillage the city of Barbados on Styx. Thanks to the extraordinary work by Lt. Colonel Cunningham and her lance, the Kuritan raiding force was driven off with heavy casualties, while the Hegemony's defenders sustained no losses of their own."

Pullman nodded. "That is a good headline, but what about you?"

"Like I said, don't mention me at all." Kincaid replied, giving the other man a thin smile.

"Really? And what about the lance of tanks that just happened to mysteriously disappear?"

"A mystery lost to the ages," Charles replied mischievously. "It will give the historians something to wonder about."





POSITION/RANK	COLONEL (HEGEMONY ARMED FORCES)
AFFILIATION/UNIT	TERRAN HEGEMONY
BIRTH YEAR	2413

The early history of Colonel Charles Kincaid, the first MechWarrior, was nearly lost to history after centuries of Cameron face-saving and cover-up attempts, followed by the chaos of the Amaris Coup destroying most of the remaining records. Republic of the Sphere archeologists in 3148 and a team from Interstellar Expeditions on Killbourn in 3149 finally uncovered Kincaid family records which allowed the production of a more complete picture.

Charles Kincaid was the eldest son of a wealthy, well-connected family hailing from Killbourn. From an early age, Kincaid's family placed expectations on him to honor a family military heritage that stretched back to Terra's Second World War. Failure was not an option and his father, Elisiah Kincaid, used every means at his disposal to ensure that his son gained the education and experiences he felt the youth would need to honor the family.

Bribes of money and real estate on Killbourn were handed out to anyone able to move Charles Kincaid upwards. Ironically, records show that Charles was highly intelligent and capable in his own right, and

would likely have gone far even without his father's meddling. Upon graduating from a prestigious preparatory school, Kincaid was sent to Terra to attend the historic West Point Academy along with several tutors, advisors, and trainers, all provided by his father. Due to his father's interference, Charles grew into a skilled tactician and charismatic leader, but never faced any form of hardship or challenge to his decisions. Upon graduation, he joined the Hegemony Armed Forces as a captain.

Kincaid's first true test came during the Hegemony's defense of Tybalt in 2435. Kincaid was placed in charge of strategic planning and operations, and to assist the effort, Director-General Jacob Cameron ordered the deployment of the new fusion-powered Merkava Mk. VII Heavy Tank. The Director-General placed a large amount of pressure on Kincaid, as the Hegemony forces had won only Pyrrhic victories at best to that point. Kincaid succeeded in using the new tanks to their full potential while personally leading the fighter contingent, and the world of Tybalt became a Hegemony Protectorate. Kincaid's name would stick with Cameron afterward as one of the few true "heroes" of that ill-conceived conflict.

Forced into the BattleMech project by his father's contacts in the Hegemony military, Kincaid was one of the finalists to pilot the MSK-5S *Mackie*. The prestige of claiming a first in military history meant that, even with his own reservations, Kincaid felt the need to succeed at any costs—including his own health. The successful *Mackie* test on 5 February 2439 went down in history, but less noted was the damage that the experimental neurohelmet wrought on Kincaid's nerve tissue, causing it to slowly deteriorate over the following decades. The issue was quickly discovered after that first test, and later neurohelmets did not have the same flaw. Evidence of the damage done to Kincaid was covered up at the highest levels.

Kincaid would go on to command the 801st Heavy Armored Regiment as a colonel. In 2443, Kincaid in his *Mackie* led an 801st lance against a DCMS armor company and supporting infantry on Styx in the first battle involving BattleMechs. Increasingly, however, the nerve damage suffered during the *Mackie* trial became too much for the primitive neurohelmets of the era to compensate for. While Kincaid continued on as a successful officer for a time, he rarely took to the field due to growing tremors in his limbs and periods of diminished consciousness. The official stance of the Kincaid family and the Hegemony was that Kincaid suffered traumatic brain injuries on Styx and never fully recovered. In fact, his family's demands for excellence and Kincaid's own desire to be the first MechWarrior rushed him into testing dangerous technology which was perfected just weeks later. He died at the age of 68 in his home on Killbourn.

MSK-5S MACKIE

POWER PLANT	VLAR 300	MASS	100 TONS	CRUISING SPEED	32 KPH
COMM SYSTEM	DALBAN COMLINE	CHASSIS	FORD SUPER H QWA3X	MAXIMUM SPEED	54K PH
T&T SYSTEM	FOI SCANSYS III	ARMAMENT	1 DONAL PPC	JUMP JETS	NONE
ARMOR	STARSHIELD X1A		1 NOVA LARGE LASER	JUMP CAPACITY	NONE
			1 CLASS 5 ARMSTRONG AUTOCANNON		

The first BattleMech brings a sense of awe and fear into those who study military history. But from the perspective of the thirty-second century, the MSK-5S *Mackie* was little more than a plaything compared to modern weapons of war. Kincaid's original *Mackie* easily survived the famous test battle against four Merkava tanks in 2439, but many of its quirks as a

prototype remained apparent during its deployment on Styx in 2443 compared to other *Mackies* under Kincaid's command.

Like the later production model MSK-6S, Kincaid's MSK-5S *Mackie* mounted the standard PPC in its left arm, but was equipped with a smaller-bore autocannon in its right arm and a single large laser in its center torso rather than a pair of medium lasers. Each of these weapons had multiple access ports to allow technicians ease of maintenance on the multiple prototype systems. Armor-plated data ports also dotted the 'Mech's arms, where an array of test stands and diagnostic equipment could be installed.

The autocannon ammunition feed required a large section of the underside armor on the right arm to be replaced with the same semitransparent material used on the 'Mech's cockpit, mounted to allow munition experts to see ammunition feeding into the weapon system and quickly determine if problems arose in the complex feed and case ejection system. The rear of the MSK-5S included massive armored shutters that could allow direct ventilation of the fusion engine in the event of heat sink failure. Large tanks would dump coolant directly on the core to shut down the reaction and the shutters would vent the vaporized chemicals out the back. Kincaid jokingly referred to it as the "Baked Bean Failsafe."

After he retired from active service, Kincaid's MSK-5S was initially displayed on his homeworld of Killbourn. But the Camerons feared some form of evidence remained in the 'Mech's databanks that would tie them to the accidental damage done to Kincaid, and removed the MSK-5S from Killbourn to Terra soon after Charles Kincaid's death in 2481. Its current whereabouts are unknown.



**POSITION/RANK**

COMMANDING GENERAL
(STAR LEAGUE DEFENSE FORCE)

AFFILIATION/UNIT

STAR LEAGUE

BIRTH YEAR

2700

Some military historians believe that greatness rests in the genes of a warrior, and those descended from notable leaders and warriors of the past therefore have the potential to achieve more than the average soldier ever could. If so, General Aleksandr Kerensky was one such man, even sharing his name with an ancestor, a great leader of ancient Terra.

After graduating from the Nagelring in 2723 and subsequently completing the Gunslinger Program, Kerensky was assigned to the 564th Hussar Regiment in the Draconis Combine. Promoted to captain, the young officer's heroism shone through on the world of Royal. With regimental command dead and his comrades overrun by the Second Sword of Light, Kerensky rallied the Hussars and held off the elite DCMS warriors until relief from the 564th's parent division arrived. Command of a regiment on the Taurian Concordat front followed, and then several high-level positions in SLDF command.

During one of these assignments to the Citadel on Terra, Kerensky met his future wife, Katyusha Ludmilova, a young staffer serving in the Intelligence Command's SI5 Counterterrorism branch.

Upon Rebecca Fetladral's retirement, Kerensky was appointed to the post of Commanding General at the age of thirty-eight. After First Lord Simon Cameron's death in 2751, the House Lords' respect for Kerensky led them to name him Regent and Protector of the Star League until then-eight-year-old Richard Cameron II came of age. Kerensky strongly rejected any attempt to influence his stance when navigating the competing interests of the Great Houses, and any of his subordinates who provided advantageous information to one House over another were immediately cashiered from the SLDF. Kerensky always kept his word, and the House Lords could count on his loyalty to the Star League over any of them individually.

The Periphery Uprising, the Amaris Coup, and the ensuing occupation of the Terran Hegemony were times of deep sorrow for the general. While Kerensky and the SLDF battled their way across half the width of the entire Inner Sphere and back again, Kerensky's wife and children lived a harrowing existence as they fought against Amaris' occupation forces in Moscow. Kerensky had foreseen that enemies at court could use Katyusha and his children against him, so he had made the difficult decision decades earlier to keep them a secret. His choice protected them in some measure by making them no more a target for the Usurper than any other resistance group operating on Terra. Katyusha's own knowledge and training played a critical role in her leadership of the effective resistance cell, which survived until Kerensky liberated Terra.

Aleksandr Kerensky's charisma, leadership, and genius for strategic planning served him well as he organized the Exodus and led approximately six million people on a long journey which ended at the Pentagon Worlds. Those same skills initially held Kerensky's Star League-in-Exile together as the stresses of colonizing the harsh new worlds threatened to pull it apart, until discontent erupted into open rebellion. In the midst of planning a coordinated offensive across all five Pentagon Worlds to crush the rebel forces in 2801, General Kerensky died of a massive heart attack at age 100. After his son Nicholas led a small group of loyalists on a Second Exodus, Kerensky was interred in a transparent coffin aboard the *McKenna's Pride* and placed in geosynchronous orbit over Katyusha City, Strana Mechty, preserving the "Great Father" as a symbol of hope for the nascent Clans.

ON1-K ORION

POWER PLANT	VLAR 300	MASS	75 TONS	CRUISING SPEED	43 KPH
COMM SYSTEM	DALBAN COMLINE	CHASSIS	K TYPE 5	MAXIMUM SPEED	64 KPH
T&T SYSTEM	DALBAN HIREZ-B	ARMAMENT	1 CLASS 10 ARMSTRONG AUTOCANNON	JUMP JETS	NONE
ARMOR	STARSHIELD		1 HARPOON-15 LRM LAUNCHER	JUMP CAPACITY	NONE
			2 STARFLASH MEDIUM LASERS		
			1 HOLLY-4 SRM LAUNCHER		

Kerensky first chose to pilot an *Orion* in 2718, and ordered multiple upgrades performed over the years. Always seeking an edge in combat, Kerensky's *Orion* was the subject of frequent tinkering and substantial modification. In one

such modification, the launch tubes for the LRM launcher were replaced by a blister of sensors and a microwave transceiver linked into an Artemis fire control and guidance system for the SRM launcher. Located under the SRM launch tubes was the shielded barrel of an advanced snub-nose PPC. The weapon included gimbal mounting controlled by myomer bundles, allowing Kerensky to skew the PPC system toward the centerline of his 'Mech and deliver precision fire at point-blank ranges. Extensive torso reinforcement allowed the mounting of a Gauss rifle and its sizable capacitor bank, along with a honeycombed reactive structure that enmeshed the Gauss rifle and missile ammunition, protecting the general from the detonation of either.

These and other upgrades paled in comparison to those made in the cockpit, where Kerensky's *Orion* most diverged from production models. Notably, a custom Studebaker-T19 command and control interface wrapped around the *Orion*'s standard SLDF command couch and neurohelmet system. The S-T19 included "smart-assist" software capable of automatically identifying and bringing forward communications and tactical displays when particular combat commands found themselves in need of strategic guidance, or when portions of the battlefield descended into chaos. These systems were a constant, whether the *Orion* was sporting standard armament or one of Kerensky's experimental loadouts.

Kerensky's *Orion* suffered heavy wear and tear throughout the campaign to crush the Rim Worlds Republic and the later liberation of Terra. Eventually, the S-T19 system could no longer function without crashing the 'Mech's control systems. Kerensky himself ordered the *Orion* stripped of advanced systems and abandoned in late September 2784 on an asteroid in the New Samarkand system.



**POSITION/RANK**

KHAN

AFFILIATION/UNIT

CLAN JADE FALCON

BIRTH YEAR

2741

Born in Alexandria, Virginia on Terra to a military family with a history stretching back to the American Revolution, Elizabeth Hazen's childhood was filled with stories of heroism and glory. Growing up, Hazen's dreams were of soldiers and generals fighting for what was right; she played with ancient tin soldiers passed down from generation to generation, and read aloud from some of the family's history books. An SLDF recruiting drive at her primary school caught her attention with its description of unit historians, who detail a division's deployments and actions. The entry tests she took on admission into the SLDF showed Hazen possessed the intelligence to be a unit historian, but her knowledge of tactics and strategy combined with her intuitive skill with a BattleMech meant she was destined to become a MechWarrior.

Hazen would later describe her initial hesitancy to become a MechWarrior, until an officer asked her, "Do you just want to read and write about history, or do you want to make it yourself?" Hazen sprinted through the SLDF MechWarrior training program at Sandhurst Royal Military College and graduated at the top of her class with scores high enough to qualify her for service in the Royal Black Watch Regiment. Already well-versed in the impressive history surrounding the unit, Hazen jumped at the chance to become a part of the legend, undergoing the year-long training and qualification trials to join and eventually becoming captain of the Royal Black Watch's Third BattleMech Company, the "Balaklava Company."

Hazen's rise through the ranks of the Black Watch was halted by the Amaris Coup on Terra and the devastation brought upon her unit. Hazen herself survived only because she happened to be visiting her injured brother, Lionel, in a nearby hospital; when Rim Worlds forces attacked, the less able-bodied patients were left behind and perished when the hospital was bombed. Hazen became the core of a resistance unit, the Ghosts of the Black Watch, which hunted and killed anyone loyal or important to the Usurper. Hazen and her unit's survivors served as bodyguards for Aleksandr Kerensky when he personally stormed Amaris' final hideout; with her 'Mech's weapons trained on the Usurper, Hazen's chance for vengeance was halted by General Kerensky himself. She would leave the SLDF for a time to travel to Eastern Europe, meditating on the violence of the war and eventually learning the ancient art of falconry at a Hungarian monastery.

Hazen's time alone in self-reflection did not go to waste; when Kerensky asked her to join his Exodus as part of his command staff, she decided that Terra had taught her everything it could. Her skill in combat and advice in strategic matters made her the general's preferred choice to quell rebellions among the Pentagon World settlers, and endeared her to Nicholas Kerensky. She would become the first Khan of Clan Jade Falcon and the most respected of its founders for her fierce attitude, tempered by her long vision of humanity's past.

HGN-732B *HIGHLANDER*

POWER PLANT	GM 270	MASS	90 TONS	CRUISING SPEED	32 KPH
COMM SYSTEM	HECTOR VII	CHASSIS	STAR LEAGUE XT	MAXIMUM SPEED	54 KPH
T&T SYSTEM	STARLIGHT LX-1 WITH ARTEMIS IV FCS	ARMAMENT	1 M-7 GAUSS RIFLE 1 HOLLY-20 LRM MISSILE RACK 1 HOLLY-6 SRM MISSILE RACK 3 HARMON STARCLASS MEDIUM LASERS	JUMP JETS	HIIDCO MODEL 10
ARMOR	GRUMMAN-3 FERRO-FIBROUS WITH CASE			JUMP CAPACITY	90 METERS

While Elizabeth Hazen began her illustrious career piloting a *Black Knight*, she gained her reputation as the specter of destruction and vengeance at the controls of her *Highlander*. When her *Black Knight* was destroyed along with most of the Black Watch at the beginning of the Amaris Civil War, Hazen and other Dispossessed MechWarriors rearmed themselves from a hidden Black Watch reserve cache on the Monongahela River. The *Highlander* she claimed had only been stored there for three months and possessed a cutting-edge communications suite that could tap into the circling constellation of Rim Worlds satellites to bounce communications lasers. This gave her the ability to effectively command and control the widespread survivors of the Black Watch across the North American continent and beyond.

Suffering severe damage time and again during the guerilla war against Amaris, Hazen's *Highlander* was given priority for repairs and refitting through the dark years of the occupation. From the installation of parts drawn from the SLDF cache deep in the salt mines under Detroit, to having its double heat sinks repaired with hand-built replacements from a workshop in Alberta, the *Highlander* became a living monument to the dedication of both the SLDF and the civilian technicians who contributed to the fight.

Hazen's prized *Highlander* was brought out of mothballs to accompany her on the Exodus, where she again piloted it during the Pentagon Civil War and Operation Klondike.

The *Highlander* survived long past Hazen's death and became a symbol of Clan Jade Falcon, with each new Khan of the Clan taking to the field in its cockpit and repeating lines of The Remembrance in honor of her memory.



ELIZABETH HAZEN



POSITION/RANK	KHAN
AFFILIATION/UNIT	CLAN WOLF
BIRTH YEAR	2755

The future Khan of Clan Wolf was born to humble beginnings on the Lyran Commonwealth world of Gallery, a cold planet circling a dim red dwarf. The harsh environment of the Winson home near Gallery's Antarctic circle hardened the young boy. The Winsons were poor, and Jerome spent much of the leaner times in the deep of winter helping his father poach animals from a Steiner family game reserve. When his father was caught, Jerome provided for his large family by continuing the poaching until he himself was caught by an SLDF officer hunting the same animal as Winson.

Instead of seeing the youth shipped to a juvenile prison, the SLDF officer convinced the local judge to allow Winson to enter the SLDF cadet program and, upon his graduation, enter active service. During his time in the cadet program, Winson was found to be an adept BattleMech pilot. As the war

against the nearby Rim Worlds Republic neared its bloody end in 2770, the teenaged Jerome was brought into active service and assigned to the 295th BattleMech Division piloting a *Mongoose*. Being the youngest MechWarrior in every battle made Winson fight harder and more aggressively than those in larger and more capable 'Mechs. By the early years of Operation Chieftain, Jerome had become a captain in charge of a heavy company of *Marauders* nicknamed "Winson's Wolves."

Winson ran his *Marauder* company like a pack of wolves, stalking Amaris' 'Mechs and focusing fire on the most damaged machine or those too heavy and slow to keep up when the rest of their unit fled the SLDF forces. If a 'Mech turned to face them, Winson would order an example made of that MechWarrior; his company ensured that nothing was salvageable and the enemy pilot nothing more than carbonized bones. The young officer's meteoric rise eventually brought him to Aleksandr Kerensky's attention, and the general included Winson among his command staff during the campaign to retake Terra.

So deep was Kerensky's trust in Winson that the general selected Jerome to lead the successful operation to rescue Kerensky's family from occupied Moscow. Winson developed a close rapport with Nicholas and Andery Kerensky, who viewed the daring young man as an older brother. These close ties with the general's family made it a foregone conclusion that Winson would join Kerensky's Exodus, even though he left behind a wife who did not wish to depart the Inner Sphere for unknown stars.

As a close confidante of Nicholas, Winson was the clear choice to lead one of the new Clans, the Wolves. While there was talk of nepotism, as Nicholas had an intimate relationship with Jerome's sister, the rapid pace at which Clan Wolf's *touman* became combat worthy spoke far louder. Winson led his new pack back to the Pentagon Worlds, fighting across Eden before redeploying alongside Clan Jade Falcon on Dagda; the Wolves and Falcons were the only two Clans to land on multiple worlds during Operation Klondike. Winson later oversaw his Clan's Absorption of the Widowmakers, during which Nicholas was killed. Elected iKhan at the start of the Golden Century, Winson eventually took his own life by poison after suffering a debilitating stroke in 2851, believing that his life as a warrior had come to an end.

MAD-2R MARAUDER

POWER PLANT	VLAR 300	MASS	75 TONS	CRUISING SPEED	0 KPH
COMM SYSTEM	DALBAN MICRONICS	CHASSIS	GM MARAUDER	MAXIMUM SPEED	0 KPH
T&T SYSTEM	DALBAN HI-REZ II	ARMAMENT	2 MAGNA FIRESTAR EXTENDED-RANGE PPCS	JUMP JETS	NONE
ARMOR	VALIANT LAMELLOR FERRO-FIBROUS WITH CASE		2 MAGNA MK II MEDIUM LASERS 1 GM WHIRLWIND AC/5	JUMP CAPACITY	NONE

Winson's long-serving *Marauder* began its life as one of the SLDF's Royal variants, produced by GM on Terra. Despite the long, successful production run of *Marauders*, a temporary shortage of key components resulted in non-standard targeting equipment being installed in a handful of 'Mechs—Winson's among them. The idiosyncrasies of the resulting targeting system might have relegated similar 'Mechs to the bottom of an SLDF cache, but actually resulted in highly accurate fire for the few MechWarriors who could get used to it.

When Winson was assigned to the *Marauder* that he would become famous for piloting, only two other MechWarriors had successfully used the 'Mech. Winson grew skilled enough with the control systems by 2772 that he had scored eighteen kills out of his company's total of forty-seven.

Winson took his *Marauder* with him on the Exodus, where it would serve him faithfully across dozens of battlefields during Operation Klondike and in trials across the Kerensky Cluster. After Winson's death, his *Marauder* was placed in alongside him in a mausoleum inside the Clan Wolf enclave on Strana Mechty, the walls adorned with bas relief carvings depicting each kill made by Winson in the cockpit of his 'Mech.



JEROME WINSON

THE SUCCE WAR

ALL WET

ROMANO LIAO

CTF - 1X CATAPHRACT

HANSE DAVION

BLR - 1G BATTLEMASTER | DANA

TAKASHI KURITA

BLR - 1G BATTLEMASTER

JAIME WOLF

ARC - 2W ARCHER

NATASHA KERENSKY

WHM - 6R WARHAMMER | BLACK LADY

MINOBU TETSUHARA

MORGAN KELL

GRAYSON CARLYLE

JUSTIN ALLARD

JANOS MARIK

MISSION OVERSIGHT

PNT - 9R PANTHER | KATANA KAT

ARC - 2R ARCHER

MAD - 3R MARAUDER

VLK - QA VALKYRIE

RFL - 3N RIFLEMAN [MODIFIED]

YORINAGA KURITA

THE BOUNTY HUNTER

THEODORE KURITA

GRAY NOTON

PAVEL RIDZIK

WHM - 6R WARHAMMER

MAD - 3R MARAUDER [MODIFIED]

ON1 - K ORION | REVENANT

RFL - 3N RIFLEMAN [MODIFIED] | LEGEND KILLER

TDR - 5S THUNDERBOLT [MODIFIED]



ALL WET

WILLIAM H. KEITH, JR.

SHORE OF THE TEMPESTIC OCEAN
50 KILOMETERS SOUTH OF AKAIWA
AUBISSON, DRACONIS COMBINE
15 NOVEMBER 3028

Storm's coming," Major Lori Kalmar said. "We're going to get wet."

Colonel Grayson Carlyle stared at the ocean horizon, weighed down by a massive wall of turbulent, blue-black clouds flecked by lightning, and shrugged. "It's *always* storming on Aubisson," he said. "At least here in the tropics. Now if a storm *wasn't* coming on this rock, *that* would be news."

Lori folded her arms and leaned against his side. "Seems to be a nice enough planet otherwise," she said. "A little on the warm side...gravity's a bit low... and it has such a damned short day. But otherwise..."

Carlyle grunted an affirmation. "It's that high rotation rate that throws up these storms," he told his senior aide, adjutant, and executive officer, the person who kept the Gray Death Legion humming along like a well-oiled machine. "Coriolis effect. But your idea of 'a little warm' might be different from the rest of us, Lor," he laughed. "It's drekking *hot*!"

"I was speaking facetiously, *sir*," she bantered back with prim haughtiness.

"I know. And our unit's official ice maiden doesn't care for the heat." Lori had been raised on Sigurd, a world out near the Periphery cloaked for the past few eons in a global ice age. She was endlessly teased about her oft-stated dislike for hot climates.

"We *are* in hurricane alley here, seems like," she said, watching the oncoming storm. "Large, warm ocean

to the east. Average daytime temperatures well above thirty Celsius. I wonder why the Dracs built PowerOne *here*?"

"I suspect the place started off as a power plant drawing on the sustainables," Carlyle replied. "Plenty of local solar...at least when it's not raining. Wind turbines. Tidal generators. All in an easily defensible stronghold. Then they brought in a fusion plant, and all the rest became obsolete...but they still had the infrastructure perched up on that damned cliff. So they built it here, even though a fusion plant can go anywhere."

"It's amazing how much civilization, *any* civilization, depends on energy production."

Carlyle nodded. "Yup. Whether it's a fusion plant in a BattleMech, or a Neolithic campfire, everything depends on a power source."

"And that's why we're here," she said.

Carlyle looked up at his *Marauder*, standing empty now, on the shore of the Tempestic Ocean, a lone sentinel against the darkening sky. Aubisson's twin suns were setting in the west, an orange disk close beside a dazzlingly bright white one, as the short period of daylight came to an end. He turned his head and looked across five kilometers of broad, open strait at sheer granite cliffs with a dome-capped fortress perched on top. "And that's why we're here."



The mercenary Gray Death Legion had been given what General Mackey had referred to as "a piece of cake," an assault on the planet Aubisson. Carlyle had learned long ago to discard all promises related to the ease of a given military operation. The only

maxims that applied in any battlefield scenario were two of the oldest: “No plan survives contact with the enemy,” and “Anything that *can* go wrong will.”

Both rules were in play here.

Their last assignment, out on a Drac border system, had been satisfactorily wrapped up, though not without casualties and not without some nail-biting uncertainty at the end. Expecting a period of much-needed rest and refit at their newly-established base on Glengarry, the Legion had been directed instead to Shionoha, where a light recon ‘Mech lance had scratched out a victory over the militia garrison there, then to Aubisson, a more important target sixteen light years in from the frontier. The fourth world of ten circling a hot, F9-K0 double star, Aubisson—officially listed as HD182025 IV—was important for its industrial infrastructure, a source of machine tools, coolant systems, and acrylic-steel armor. The Gray Death Legion had been assigned this objective as one small part of the ongoing Lyran offensive across much of the frontier with the Draconis Combine, an offensive code-named Operation Götterdämmerung. Intelligence had reported Aubisson was defended only by third-rate militia units, easy pickings...but, as was often the case, Intelligence had been dead wrong.

Here, there were *Dragons*.

The garrison in this sector wasn’t militia at all, but some of the Draconis Combine’s finest—the Eighth Sword of Light, an elite unit known as the Jade Dragon. They were supposed to be on Luthien, the Combine’s capital hundreds of light years distant, but at least one company evidently had been transferred to Aubisson.

And they were here, occupying PowerOne, the hilltop fortress just across this shallow arm of the sea.

Aubisson was a heavily settled world, as well as heavily industrialized, with an estimated population of over two billion. The key to the entire world was the city of Akaiwa, fifty kilometers north of here.

And the Legion needed that key, and needed it fast.

They were up against one of the most fundamental problems of modern space warfare. How did a unit like the Gray Death—three companies, a total of thirty-six BattleMechs—conquer *an entire planet*? The vid-dramas made that sort of thing look easy—a handful of MechWarrior heroes descending from the sky, capturing the planet’s capital, and taking the local government’s oath of allegiance.

Real life, real *war*, wasn’t like that.

Thirty-six ‘Mechs against two billion inhabitants? Not even ‘Mechs could enforce the martial law imposed by a new government. If the citizens rose

up in open revolt, the ‘Mechs could slaughter them by the tens of thousands...but in the end, they would be overwhelmed. A BattleMech could face a poorly armed mob of a thousand civilians without breaking a sweat... but odds of a million to one? That just wasn’t fair!

But Akaiwa got its electrical power from PowerOne, right here...along with perhaps a hundred smaller, satellite cities across this half of the continent. Control PowerOne, and the Legion would have its finger on the off-switch for every joule of power used by the capital... including its landing port, its factories, and its military barracks.

At least, so Carlyle had reasoned while studying the world from orbit. You did not simply put your DropShips down anywhere and send your BattleMechs out to fight. You needed a plan.

“Damn it, Grayson,” Captain Don Ramage had told him as they’d discussed it. “You’re playing mighty fast and loose with the Ares Conventions! PowerOne is a *civilian* target!”

Carlyle had nodded. “Article Five,” he said, reciting the hallowed document from memory. “*No battle shall be waged in an urban area except under extreme circumstances. If the military objective of an assault lies in a city center, attacking troops must ensure that any hostile action causes the least possible amount of collateral damage. No attack may be made against any civilian target, for any reason. Civilian targets shall be deemed to include such life-supporting equipment as water and air purifiers, agricultural assets, or any other item that enables a planet’s population to continue their existence.*”

“Exactly,” Ramage had said. “The city’s power plant is the heart of the civilian infrastructure. You *can’t* destroy that!”

“First,” Carlyle had replied evenly, “I don’t intend to destroy it. We grab it, we hold it, and we let them know that we control their electric. I think they’ll come to the negotiating table pretty damned quick after that.

“Second...the Convention is self-contradictory, and has loopholes you could pilot a JumpShip through. ‘*No attack may be made against any civilian target, for any reason,*’ it says. Okay... but just before that it says ‘*No battle shall be waged in an urban area except under extreme circumstances.*’ I could argue that by holding the power plant we’re *avoiding* attacking the city, right?”

“Sounds like space-lawyer dreck to me.”

“Hm. And what do we make of ‘*any other item that enables a planet’s population to continue*”

their existence. The power plant is necessary for transportation, certainly, and a lot of luxuries like vids and lights... but the locals can live without power on this world if they have to. It's not like the surface is in hard vacuum, or broiling at a couple of hundred degrees C. Besides, Aubisson belonged to the Lyrans up until a couple of centuries ago. I think they'll cooperate."

"Definitely a space lawyer. Sir."

"We'll kick the Drac governor out," Carlyle said. "But the civilians will be with us."

"Sir...you *are* aware of studies that suggest that any major city is less than a week away from cannibalism if the food transport is shut down? No city has enough food on the shelves to feed its entire population for very long, especially once the rioting starts."

"Trust me, Don. These are city folks who like their comforts...lights and flush toilets and all the rest. Cut those off and they'll give in long before they start eating each other."

Privately, though, Carlyle knew the plan was risky, even with a population already on their side. A longtime student of military history, he'd given a lot of thought to one campaign in old Terra's bloody history, in the pre-spaceflight era a thousand years ago.

Leningrad.



"Colonel? Ramage here. We're ready to move."

"Okay," Carlyle said. He was strapped into the cockpit of his *Marauder*, still standing on the shore of the Tempestic Ocean. "Copy. Anything in front of you?"

"Not yet."

Ramage's emphasis on the "yet" was a gentle reminder that he and his ground assault force were sticking their necks out for Carlyle. And Carlyle knew they were going to take some losses.

"We only want a demonstration on the causeway," Carlyle reminded him. "Don't get pulled into a stand-up fight, and pull back if the Drac fire gets too heavy."

"Don't worry, colonel. My survival instinct is in perfect working order, thank you very much."

"Good." He switched channels. "Lieutenant Khaled... are you ready?"

"We are, Colonel. Ready to engage."

"Remember, this is only a diversion. Break off if it gets too hot."

"We will remember."

Carlyle wasn't sure the assault lance's temporary C.O. would remember. Hassan Khaled was taciturn and undemonstrative, a moderate and apolitical Muslim who nevertheless believed that whatever happened, it was the will of Allah. He generally had little to say... but in a firefight he was tenacious and deadly, his 70-ton *Warhammer* wielding its twin heavy particle cannons with ruthless efficiency.

"Ah still think we should ay' a commit wi' you, Colonel," Lieutenant Davis McCall added. The big Scot in his *Rifleman* had insisted that his place was with Carlyle and with Lori Kalmar.

"Negative, Lieutenant," Carlyle replied. "We need the big guns on the causeway."

"Weel, you're kickin' in tha' wee back door wi' tha' *Marauder* of yours!!"

"Aye, laddie," Carlyle replied, gently mocking McCall's Scot's burr. "Boot *someone* has to help tha' wee bairns!"

"I think I resent that," Kalmar said, bantering.

"Don't worry, Davis," Garin Rastovic said. "We'll kick in the door from the west, they'll kick it from the south, and we'll see who gets to Scotland afore ye!"

"It's not bluidy Scotland I'm worrit about," McCall replied.

Carlyle grinned. McCall's intense sense of personal loyalty to both him and to Lori could be as annoying as it was endearing. At least he knew how to follow orders...even unsavory ones.

The twin suns sank below the horizon, the planet's short day giving way to darkness with tropical swiftness. The oncoming storm began blowing moments later, as breakers crashed against the beach and rain splattered across Carlyle's cockpit.

"Okay, Legion," he said. "Assault and fire lances and ground forces...move out!" *And God go with you!* he added silently.

The island called Omishima had proven to be a tough nut to crack. The large and rocky island was located in the middle of a large bay called Akiwan, joined to the mainland by a narrow, arrow-straight causeway over a kilometer long. The western end of the island, where it opened beyond the causeway, was low, flat, and broad, with what appeared to be heavy defensive fortifications blocking the way. Behind the wall, the power plant—Denkiichi, or PowerOne—was a sprawling ferrocrete structure built atop a rising slope, with rugged cliffs surrounding the rest of the island on three sides.

The Gray Death's first reconnaissance in force down the causeway yesterday had been repulsed with almost contemptuous ease. The Draconis Combine forces on the island numbered at least six *Dragons* and a number of smaller 'Mechs in support—*Commandos*, *Javelins*, an *Archer*, a *Wolverine*, and others. Lined up behind the looming defensive wall, the defenders could focus their fire on the causeway and sweep it like a broom. In the attack yesterday, Bear's *Crusader* had taken heavy damage and was still out of action, though the MechWarrior had survived. Paul Vomer hadn't been so lucky when three Kurita *Dragons* had concentrated their fire on his *Commando* and blasted it into steaming junk.

And now Carlyle was sending two lances and a platoon of hovercraft down that same fire-swept causeway, a desperate play to give two more lances a chance at the back door.

For a long moment, there was silence. Then light flared at the island end of the causeway, and the battle was joined.



Inna Lilayhi wa inna ilayhi rajiun....

The familiar Arabic litany flowed like gentle music through Khaled's thoughts, comforting and reassuring.

Lieutenant Hassan Ali Khaled was not a particularly observant Muslim, not like some he'd known. He'd left his far-off homeworld of Shaul Khala, in the heart of the Draconis Combine, after a doctrinal falling out with the Saurimat Commandos, an elite and secretive band similar in concept to the ancient Hashashin of Persia. He never talked about what had happened, never...but his lack of devotion to the particulars of Islamic law and custom had marked him as *kafir*, someone who rejected Allah.

But he still carried with him many deeply ingrained social structures and customs of the Shi'ite enclave at al-Thawrah, the City of the Revolution, where he'd grown up. He never spoke of his personal beliefs to others, nor did he desire to convert those around him to the path of Allah...but he still maintained a deep, personal, and above all *private* devotion to Him.

The ancient litany translated as "To Allah we belong, and to Him is our return." It was a way of commending his survival into Allah's hand at the start of battle.

Another flash lit the deepening night as long-range missiles arced out from behind the defensive wall ahead. At a range of 420 meters, they were now within optimal range of the weapons.

"Koga! Rastovic!" he called. "Engage the enemy. Fire!"

"On the way," Rastovic replied. His 'Mech was a 65-ton *Catapult*, its bullet-shaped body mounting huge LRM launchers to either side and balanced on massive digitigrade legs. He halted in the middle of the narrow causeway, canted the launchers to a 45-degree angle, and loosed his first volley.

Isoru Koga piloted the Legion's single ARC-2R *Archer*, a 70-ton monster with an LRM launcher mounted in each shoulder. As taciturn as Khaled, Koga simply acknowledged with a curt "Sending," and launched his own flight of missiles.

They couldn't see the enemy. The wall across the end of the causeway was fifteen meters high—taller than any 'Mech—and the enemy was sheltering behind it, using indirect fire on the Legion's slowly advancing forces.

Behind and to either flank, the rest of the assault force was spreading out. Ramage's Maxim APCs shrieked out over the bay, their lift fans throwing up huge clouds of spray dimly seen in the darkness. McCall's *Rifleman* and Thomas Reid's *Thunderbolt* had stepped into the shallow water to either side and were advancing slowly. The water, Khaled thought, would help cool those big machines when the firefight grew more intense. The *Rifleman* mounted no missiles and was still out of range, but the *T-bolt* packed a massive cylinder perched on its left shoulder, the launch tubes for its Delta Dart LRMs.

Khaled's own *Warhammer* carried a Holly SRM launcher on its right shoulder, but those were strictly for close-up direct fire. His main armament, the heavy Donal Particle Projector Cannon taking up each arm, could have hit the wall at this range, but would not be very effective. They would have to get a lot closer before those twin lightning projectors could be brought into play.

Stolidly, under a rain of incoming missiles, the assault lance ground forward as warheads detonated among them, brilliant flashes of light each briefly illuminating the darkness.



"Right," Carlyle said. "Time to move out. Compass heading will be zero-zero-nine."

"We're right behind you, Gray," Lori's voice said over his headset. "Let's get wet."

"We're *already* wet," Sergeant Sharyl objected. "It's raining!" Her *Shadow Hawk* was next in line behind Kalmar's. Native of a harsh mining world called

Dahar IV, she came from a culture that didn't use surnames, though in polite society she might be introduced as "Sharyl, Eric's Daughter." She was, Carlyle knew, a hell of a warrior.

"You have the cable, Lor?"

"Right here."

He guided his *Marauder* forward, each step taking him down the narrow shelf of beach and into the wind-whipped ocean spray. It was raining hard now, and the darkness was almost complete save for the explosions strobing against the causeway to the left, and the occasional flicker of lightning against the horizon. Carlyle could just make out the PowerOne plant against the night. There were lights on beneath the visible portions of the buildings, hidden by the walls. *Good*, he thought. *That will shoot their night vision*. He'd been counting on that.

He continued moving forward, and then waves were breaking over the curving back of his *Marauder*. Another few steps and his cockpit was completely under water. He'd been hearing the howl of the wind outside his hull without really being aware of it. He was aware now by its absence. It was quiet down here, quiet and dark and still.

Carlyle was aware of a few other instances of a 'Mech force making an approach under the water, a tactic that was unusual but certainly possible. BattleMechs were airtight and pressurized, allowing them to operate in hard vacuum, and if they could operate in vacuum, they could operate here. Walking, though, was a tedious process, a slogging advance through water that resisted his every step. Between the dark and the sediments stirred up by each step, visibility was at absolute zero.

But they *were* invisible.

Besides the two *Shadow Hawks*, the flanking force consisted of Delmar Clay's *Wolverine*, Francine Roget's *Panther*, Lonnie Mackleroy's *Commando*, Connor Smit's *Wasp*, and Sylvia Trevor's *Stinger*. With the sole exception of Carlyle's *Marauder*, all had an upright, humanoid stance, two plantigrade legs, and arms with grasping hands.

They were going to need that humanoid articulation, including grasping hands, very soon now.

Progress through the watery darkness was painfully slow. It wasn't like Grayson was pushing against the water with his own muscles, of course...but his *Marauder* was so sluggish, its movement like something out of a dream.

Or a waking nightmare...

He checked the time.

Without radio communications, there was no way to check on what was happening with the rest of the strike force.

But Hassan ought to be pulling back just about *now*...



"Disengage! Disengage! Everyone pull back now!"

Khaled stood in the center of the causeway, firing his PPCs alternately at the advancing enemy. Incoming missiles slammed against the gravel surface, and three struck him square in the center of his torso. He leaned into the firestorm, returning shot for shot.

Some of the Kurita defenders had come out into the open, charging through a high, broad gate in the wall. Four *Dragons* and a pair of *Panthers*, all bearing the curled jade dragon emblem of the Eighth Sword of Light, were moving down the narrow straightaway directly at the Legion attackers.

"Just offhand, Laddie," McCall said, "I'd say th' Colonel's plan is aye workin' a treat!"

"Maybe," Rastovic said, recovering from a missile impact on the dorsal armor of his *Catapult*, "just a bit *too well*!..."

"All we need to do," Khaled said, "is keep the *fajarah* interested in us. If they're watching us, they're not looking anywhere else."



We've got to be nearly there, Carlyle thought.

The blackness enclosing him was claustrophobic, suffocating in its intensity. It was possible to believe that the entire rest of the universe was gone, that all that remained was his tiny cubicle of light and sound inside the *Marauder's* cockpit. Twice, he'd switched on his external spotlights, when some unseen obstacle blocked his path. Once it had been a jumble of concrete blocks. Then it had been a mass of fishing net that almost entangled his legs and tripped him up. Trevor had run into some trouble as well; he'd briefly seen her lights off to the right, though the sediment was thick to the point of being viscous.

Other than that, they'd kept the lights off. The water was so murky that they weren't much use, and the team had to rely on moving slowly, step by step, *feeling* ahead for obstacles with their feet. Sometimes you could make out the lights of other 'Mechs in the distance... but the snowstorm of sediment around them turned their immediate surroundings into a white fog... with a glare that might be spotted by watchers on the cliffs ahead. With a steady compass heading, none of them should wander *too far off course*.

He thought, though, that the ground was rising. His only means of determining his depth was a barometric pressure gauge on his console, and since he wasn't sure of the atmospheric pressure above the water, all he could do was guess that they'd gone through a valley perhaps thirty meters deep, and that the bottom was rising now with each slow and cumbersome step.

The silt covering the sea floor here was deep, dragging at his 'Mech's feet, but a *Marauder* had long, broad, flat feet that were superb at distributing ground pressure. They *should* keep him from becoming mired...

He wondered how the others were faring.

Yes...the ground was definitely rising. He thought he could see a glimmer of light ahead and above... and moments later the water cascaded from his *Marauder's* dorsal surface and sheeted down his windscreens. Suddenly, he was aware once more of the howl of the wind and the lash of the rain. Waves were breaking over jagged tumble-downs of boulders ahead, and he could feel his 'Mech being buffeted by the rollers.

The light was from the PowerOne fortress, a glare coming up from behind the black loom of the clifftops.

He emerged on a narrow shelf of gravel beach only a few meters wide, facing the cliff. Ages ago, the island of Omishima had exploded to the surface in a volcanic outburst. Upthrust lava had cooled, then cracked, forming tall pillars of black basalt that formed a kind of ragged staircase leading up into the night sky. To either side, others of his unit began emerging from the water as well...a *Shadow Hawk* that was either Lori or Sharyl to his right, and Clay's *Griffin* to his left. That was Lori's 'Hawk, he realized; he could see the meters of heavy fibroweave cable circling her 'Mech's torso like a thick and ungainly bandolier.

Mackleroy's *Commando* struggled through the surf almost a hundred meters to the east, and Smit's *Wasp* was with him. Roget's *Panther* was rising from the waves behind them, stumbling once in the power of the breakers... followed by Trevor's *Stinger*. He breathed a sigh of relief. They were scattered by their hike through the unrelenting black, but they'd all made it.

The first hurdle was complete.

No fire greeted them from the cliffs overhead, no searchlights, no warning, no glare of spotlights. Perhaps they'd actually pulled this thing off.

But he wouldn't congratulate himself yet. The toughest part of the op-plan was yet to come.

"I'm not sure I can do this, Gray," Lori said, standing now next to him and carefully uncoiling the cable to prevent tangling it.

"Sure you can, Lori. You're not using your own muscles, remember?"

"I'm more worried about the climb. These rocks are wet."

"Hook me up. Let's give it a try."

One end of the cable ended in a tow hook that Lori clipped through an eye mounted on the *Marauder's* nose, just under the cockpit. Carlyle heard the *clank* as it snapped home.

"Okay," she said. "You're on. Just so I don't drop you."

The others were already working their way up the cliff, carefully searching out ledges, crevices, and handholds to pull their 'Mechs up a step at a time. The broken columns of volcanic rock provided some footholds, but BattleMechs really weren't really designed for this sort of thing.

"But why else," he'd asked his dubious team when he'd laid the plan before them hours earlier, "design giant armored combat machines to look like *people*? It's a damned stupid idea... *unless* you want them to move like humans through terrain too rugged, too vertical for tanks. The human form is ridiculously vulnerable...but it's also *adaptable*, and that's what we need here."

"But, colonel," Sharyl had protested. "Do you think we can keep our balance up there? With that kind of acrobatics?"

"You mean perched up on top of a ten-meter-plus 'Mech?" Carlyle had grinned. "That's what neurohelmets are for."

Indeed, simply making a 'Mech walk would have been all but impossible without the neurohelmet feedback loop, which let a MechWarrior sense the 'Mech's attitude, its movement, and any unsteadiness, giving him a sense of balance.

But Carlyle had been forced to admit it to himself. He had no idea how far you could push either the theory or the technology.

They would find out for themselves in the coming minutes.

Lightning flared, thunder cracked. Roget and Smit were already approaching the top of the cliff, perhaps twenty-five meters up, more than twice the height of most 'Mechs. Carlyle stood at the base of the cliff, peering up into the rain-sleeting darkness as the other 'Mechs climbed.

There was no way in hell his *Marauder* could make that ascent, not without a lot of help from 'Mechs more generically maneuverable than his. His machine had two powerful legs, sufficient to support a 75-ton 'Mech and to take it along level ground at more than sixty kilometers per hour...but both arms ended in the massive gauntlet housings for his Magna Hellstar particle projection cannons. No hands...no way to grab hold of rock ledges or crevices. Generally it wasn't a disadvantage in combat, but the lack of hands did constrain the *Marauder* to more or less flat ground.

But with a little help....maybe....

"We're up, Gray," Kalmar called to him over the tactical channel. "We're ready."

"So am I," he called back. "Haul me up!"

"On belay!"

He felt the cable tug against the eyebolt, dragging his *Marauder* forward and up. He swung his 'Mech's feet forward, bracing them against the rock, then clumsily walking up the basaltic columns as the cable continued to tighten, hauling his mass forward and up the face of the cliff. His neurohelmet gave him a sense of where his 'Mech's legs were, a sense of up and down and of dangling over an increasingly yawning gulf, but the sensations were distant, as though his human body was muffled in thick rolls of insulation.

The cable reportedly had a tensile strength sufficient to lift one hundred tons, but there were so many unknowns, so many variables that could result in a snap and a long fall with an abrupt impact at the bottom. Too much stress at a single point...chafing on the rocks...sudden stress as his legs kicked out from under him...any of these things could exceed the cable's breaking point.

There was also the problem of the 'Mechs doing the hauling up above. If they lost their footing on wet ground, if they lost their grip on the wet cable...

Carlyle tried not to think about that. He felt his right foot find a ledge and focused on straightening the leg, boosting him higher. *I must*, he thought, *be a ridiculous sight*.

He decided it was a good thing it was dark. No one could see him.

His left foot slipped from a precarious hold, the basalt slick and treacherous. For a terrifying moment, he dangled in mid-air, swinging out over the gulf, then back in to collide with solid rock, the 'Mech's nose pointing straight up into the sky. He was flat on his back, desperately trying to regain his uncertain footing, and wondering if he was about to plunge into the darkness—worse, if he was about to drag his fellow MechWarriors down with him.

And then, somehow, *somehow*...he was up, helped over the lip of the cliff by Sharyl and Roget, as Lori and Clay and Mackleroy continued to haul on the cable, with Trevor and Smit in their lighter 'Mechs standing guard. His first step onto the cliff's edge sent a tumble of boulders down the steep slope behind him and into the dark.

But he'd made it.

"Thanks," he told them. "*That* was a trip!"

"Are you *sure* we need the *Marauder* up here?" Clay asked. "Not too late for you to go back down!"

Yeah, it would have been a lot easier on all of them if the more capable 'Mechs had simply made the climb, and Carlyle had stayed with the diversionary force on the causeway. But they didn't know what they would find up here, weren't sure of the enemy's unit composition, and he'd wanted the *Marauder's* heavy firepower with the flanking group as

insurance. Throwing a handful of *Stingers* and even *Shadow Hawks* at a pack of *Dragons* was a great way to take heavy casualties.

"As long as I'm here," he replied, turning to survey the scene. "Let's see what we've got."

The plateau at the top was slightly higher than the PowerOne facility, which was spread out below them on a gentle slope, well-lit by spotlights and the glare of broad area illuminators. He could see the wall to the west, and half a dozen large 'Mechs behind it—*Dragons*, *Panthers*, and a couple of *Trebuchets*, it looked like. The *Trebs* were busy loosing flights of LRMs at the Legion 'Mechs halfway up the causeway, leaning back to send them arcing over the wall. Beyond were Khaled and his team, invisible in the darkness but with their position marked by the detonations of LRMs.

"Hassan?" Carlyle called over the tactical.

"I'm here, colonel." It was tough to tell with the taciturn Khaled...but Carlyle thought he sounded relieved, as if he'd been figuratively holding his breath.

"We're up. We're on top of the cliffs and beginning to move down toward the objective. If you're in a position to do so, I suggest you threaten their gate."

"Copy, sir. We're on our way."



The Combine forces, fixated on Khaled's attack, didn't see the Legion strike team in their rear until it was too late. After a short jog down the slope, Carlyle waded into the fight, hammering the enemy *Dragons* from behind, burning them down with concentrated PPC fire and pounding them with his autocannon. Lori and Sharyl stood at his sides with Clay's *Wolverine* off to the left, focusing their combined laser and autocannons on the targets Carlyle selected, while Roget's *Panther*, Mack's *Commando*, Trevor's *Stinger* and Smit's *Wasp* circled left and right, jabbing at the surrounded enemy, using their jump jets to land where they were least expected, strike hard and fast, then blast out again.

Two Kurita *Dragons* were already down, a third badly damaged. A *Trebuchet* took a barrage of autocannon fire, followed by a volley of Lori's short-ranged missiles slamming into its torso, detonating its missile stores and exploding in a raging fireball.

Then the gate in the western wall dissolved in a firestorm of missile and PPC fire, admitting Khaled's looming *Warhammer*, followed by the other heavy 'Mechs—a *Thunderbolt*, an *Archer*, a *Catapult*, a *Rifleman*...

The battle, such as it was, was swiftly over. The Kurita 'Mechs, heavily outnumbered and forced into a

huddled circle back-to-back behind the gate, dropped to their knees one by one, indicating surrender.

Carlyle was surprised. The Sword of Light was considered to be a fanatical unit, one unlikely to surrender under any circumstances. The double-pronged attack, though, had overwhelmed them so quickly they'd not gotten into a *kamikaze* frame of mind. As first one, then another of the surviving *Dragons* took the knee, the rest swiftly followed suit.



"In *The Art of War*," Carlyle said over a rare glass of scotch the next evening, "Sun Tzu says, 'The greatest victory is that which requires no battle.' He also said, 'The supreme act of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.'"

They were in the lobby of Aubisson's Government House, located in the city center of Akaiwa, the capital. With PowerOne in Legion hands, Akaiwa had surrendered, though the fighting wasn't over in all parts of the planet just yet. The Kurita planetary governor had fled; the city's mayor had welcomed what he called "liberation."

But Carlyle had guards patrolling the lobby, just in case.

"Aye," McCall said, refilling his glass from the bottle on the table. "Boot th' fact tha' the wee bastards caved in instead of scrappin'...weel, it means we're aye outnumbered."

"We will need to be watchful," Khaled said. The scotch was *haram* to a Muslim, and he was drinking tea.

"Will we even be able to *hold* Aubisson?" Kalmar asked.

His senior officers were correct. The Gray Death's hold on the planet was tenuous. Other Legion assets still fighting elsewhere on the planet might yet run into trouble, and Carlyle was concerned about the locals engaging in a guerilla uprising. For now, however, the Gray Death controlled Akaiwa and the local spaceport, and that was a good start.

"I think so," Carlyle replied carefully. "We've rounded up all the Combine BattleMechs and deactivated them. Captain Ramage is patrolling the streets with his armor. It's been quiet, no sign of resistance so far. In fact, most of the locals seem pretty glad to see us."

"I noticed that," Clay said. "You know, when we walked into the city, I had pretty women throwing flowers at my 'Mech. People waving Lyran flags and hanging them from their balconies. The mayor gave us that nice welcoming speech."

"Aubisson belonged to the Lyran Commonwealth less than two hundred years ago," Kalmar said. "I don't think they ever took to being part of the Combine."

"Well, the important thing is that reinforcements are on the way," Carlyle said. "Lyran Guards. We should be able to hand things over to them in a week or so."

"I don't blame them," Khaled said quietly. "Life under Combine rule can be...bleak."

All in all, Carlyle thought, *a most satisfactory campaign—brief, successful, and with light casualties*. The Legion hadn't quite fulfilled Sun Tzu's admonishments about winning without fighting, but they'd come damned close.

He was also aware that he'd taken a fearful risk. Had the flanking party been spotted, a small force on the top of those cliffs would have burned them all down at the water's edge. They never would have survived that climb.

Or if his people had been dragged over the edge trying to haul 75 tons of *Marauder* up the cliff in that driving rain...

And then there was the example of Leningrad... a city on Terra a thousand years before that had endured 872 days of siege by an implacable invading enemy in a genocidal campaign. There'd been reports of cannibalism...

Carlyle shook himself, pushing the thought aside. As he'd guessed, as he'd hoped, the civilian population had welcomed them as liberators. His strategy had *worked*.

And in the long run, *that* was all that mattered.

He raised his half-empty glass to Khaled. "Your demonstration at the gate was flawless, Hassan," he said. "Your heavies came through exactly at the right time. Well done."

Khaled gave an uncomfortable shrug. "*Hasbi Allah*."

"Meaning?"

"Allah will suffice me."

"Ah." Carlyle smiled and drained his glass. It took skill to win a battle...but it also took...call it luck, Providence, or the hand of Allah. And anyone who said different was...

...all wet.



**POSITION/RANK**

CHANCELLOR

AFFILIATION/UNIT

CAPELLAN CONFEDERATION

BIRTH YEAR

2992

After perhaps engineering her broken father's suicide, Romano Liao became Chancellor of the Capellan Confederation at the age of 44, only to descend into madness and die an ignominious death in turn. This closing act came to dominate narratives of her life, overlooking a bloody and remarkable career as a MechWarrior prior to the Fourth Succession War.

Romano, like Hanse Davion, was second in line for the throne and thus never intended to rule. This freed her for relatively straightforward service in the military. Given the option of any number of plum assignments, she surprised everyone, including her father, when she chose a placement with the Confederation Reserve Cavalry. Her explanation was that the Red Lancers and similar units received plenty of attention already; the willingness of a Liao to serve with a less prestigious unit would show the Capellan Confederation Armed Forces that all its elements were valued. Some speculated at the time that the real reason behind her choice of the distant Reserve Cavalry was a desire to get out from under

her father's thumb, with the Red Lancers—Romano's more natural choice—almost always based on the capital.

Despite her quasi-egalitarian statements, rank hath its privileges. Nominally a major, Romano had a position created for herself, one that made her the special overseer of the entire Reserve Cavalry brigade: all five regiments. The need to spread these regiments across the Confederation, however, meant that most operated day to day as they did prior. Her preferred unit was the Fourth Reserve, with which she saw most of her frontline service—primarily alongside the First and Second Battalions. Romano was an adequate administrator at best, but her presence ensured that the Fourth (and to a lesser extent, the other Reserve Cavalry regiments) rocketed up the CCAF supply priority ladder, ensuring the loyalty of her troops.

It is said that there is no love like young love, and Romano proved that. Taking up her new post at the age of 20, Romano alternated between periods of devotion to her job and periods of noble debauchery until, when she was 23, her lover of the moment died in a Marik raid on Hsien. For much of the next eight years—3015 to 3023—Romano Liao cut a swath across the Free Worlds League. Her campaign of revenge began on Menkalinan, a world which was often the site of conflict between the Confederation and the League. Leading a battalion of the Fourth in a sudden descent on the Marik capital, Romano and her troops savaged the Marik militia forces, destroying two regiments of infantry and armor. She continued these surgical strikes for years, and in 3022 she smashed her way onto Berenson, where her infamous penchant for cruelty first manifested. Personally killing the Marik baron who commanded the world's 'Mech garrison, she had his surrendered MechWarriors strapped into their cockpits. Heedless of the waste of materiel, Romano then had the captive 'Mechs piled high with the garrison's stockpile of munitions and inferno gel and set alight in a pyre visible from low orbit. Similarly, her strike on Talitha the following year saw her slaughter her way through six regiments of infantry, refusing to end her campaign of terror until that world's finest artists produced a series of sculptures commemorating her slain lover. Executing two sculptors for "failing to properly capture his transcendent beauty" and a painter for "bourgeois Free Worlds decadence," she departed with a DropShip hold full of marble likenesses just ahead of the incoming Marik Guard.

Eventually, her lust for vengeance was slaked. New lovers and an interest in the politics surrounding the Warrior Houses drew her back to Sian, where she spent most of her remaining days until her assassination in 3052 at the hands of her older sister, Candace Liao.

CTF-1X CATAPHRACT

POWER PLANT	VOX 280	MASS	70 TONS	CRUISING SPEED	43 KPH
COMM SYSTEM	COMMUTECH MULTI-CHANNEL 10	CHASSIS	EARTHWERKS CTF	MAXIMUM SPEED	64 KPH
T&T SYSTEM	BLAZEFIRE SIGHTLOCK	ARMAMENT	1 CERESARMS SMASHER PPC 1 SARLON MAXICANNON TYPE 10	JUMP JETS	NONE
ARMOR	KALLON ROYALSTAR		4 CERESARMS MEDIUM LASERS	JUMP CAPACITY	NONE

Romano preferred a *Highlander* during her time with the Reserve Cavalry, but when Earthwerks previewed its new BattleMech, the *Cataphract*, Romano was enchanted by the ungainly prototype. The first model was much clumsier and unfinished than later production variants, but something in the original spoke to Romano, and she piloted this rough beast for the rest of her life. Though her days as a frontline MechWarrior were behind her by the time she seated herself at the controls, when she appeared in official functions at the head of the CCAF she always piloted it. Many Capellan citizens came to associate the 'Mech with their state's resilience, as Romano was constantly seen with it in propaganda broadcasts during the Magistracy-Andurien invasion.

While this *Cataphract* never saw combat, it still drew blood for the Confederation after a fashion. Once Romano became Chancellor she grew increasingly unstable, displaying a streak of wanton cruelty that more and more often echoed the worst atrocities of her anti-Marik campaign. For the executions of the greatest enemies of the state—a status conveyed on an ever-growing number of people as Romano's reign progressed and paranoia took hold—she enjoyed carrying out the sentence personally, sometimes annihilating the condemned with PPC fire but more often simply crushing them beneath her feet, a symbolic victory of the Capellan state over traitors everywhere.

After Romano Liao's assassination, her son and successor Sun-Tzu had the *Cataphract* mothballed. Following the bombardment of Sian during the Jihad, the 'Mech disappeared and was presumed lost in the carnage, though rumors persist that members of the Thuggees spirited it away.



ROMANO LIAO

**POSITION/RANK**

FIRST PRINCE

AFFILIATION/UNIT

FEDERATED SUNS

BIRTH YEAR

2983

As the second son of the ruling Davion family of the Federated Suns, Hanse Davion was free of many of the responsibilities of rank. Proving himself a masterful MechWarrior, he could eventually have been one of the greatest field marshals the Federated Suns had ever seen, were fate not to intervene.

Attending the Albion Military Academy, Hanse graduated with honors. While expected to serve tours of duty like all Federated Suns leaders, Hanse relentlessly campaigned for combat assignments, driving his older brother Ian—First Prince and ruler of the Suns—to distraction with requests to remove the bureaucratic and diplomatic fetters that usually cocooned one of his position. Getting his way, Hanse's earliest military actions came as a lance commander with the Third RCT of the Royal Brigade of Guards, during which time he demonstrated a knack for the unorthodox and a penchant for the daring. By 3011, his leadership skills and birthright had made him commander of the Third's 'Mech regiment, but his own prowess at the controls of a BattleMech had gained him at least ten kills and Marksman status twice over.

In 3012, Hanse served as his brother's right hand in the troubled Capellan March, demonstrating an aptitude for governance, logistics, and wider command and control. Reinvigorating the dispirited Davion forces of that region, he led them to a crushing victory over the CCAF at the Battle of Wright, adding another six personal kills in the course of the campaign. As military governor of New Aragon, Hanse's skills on the battlefield and political acumen earned him the nickname "The Fox."

As there was always the risk of Ian's death from disease or battle, Hanse was schooled in the necessities of statecraft as well as war. When Ian Davion died during the Battle of Mallory's World in 3013, Hanse was ready to take his place as First Prince of the Federated Suns. Gaining much renown but losing a fiancée in the Battle of Halstead Station, a campaign he personally directed during the first year of his reign, Hanse soon shifted his attention to the stage of grand strategy, formulating plans to reverse the stagnant state warfare had fallen into during the long malaise of the Third Succession War.

Battling the skepticism of his advisors, Hanse helped engineer a marriage alliance with the Lyrn Commonwealth that largely secured his border with the Draconis Combine, and then constructed one of the greatest strategic masterstrokes of Inner Sphere history: the dissection of the Capellan Confederation. A colossal success, the bold invasion secured half of the Confederation and cemented the creation of a superstate the likes of which had not been seen since the days of the Star League. Though by necessity based on New Avalon during the war, he saw personal combat again in 3029 when a ComStar strike team, masquerading as a Capellan Death Commando force, landed in the capital. Hanse met the invaders in his *BattleMaster*, scoring eight kills in a confused street brawl before supporting forces moved to crush the attackers.

The Fourth Succession War would prove to be the peak of Hanse's career. Never seeing personal combat again, Hanse's attempt to secure a similar victory against the Draconis Combine in the War of 3039 was foiled thanks to firm Kuritan leadership and ComStar machinations. When the Clans returned to claim their own birthright in 3049, Hanse worked feverishly to organize a coalition of the squabbling Inner Sphere states to meet this new, greater menace, again with limited success. However, he proved instrumental in the successful defense of Luthien, capital of the Suns' ancient Kuritan foe, from a combined Nova Cat/Smoke Jaguar assault with his timely dispatch of mercenary forces, again demonstrating his broader vision. Hanse Davion died of a heart attack in 3052 at the age of 69.

BLR-1G BATTLEMASTER

CADMUS/DANA

POWER PLANT	VOX 340	MASS	85 TONS	CRUISING SPEED	43 KPH
COMM SYSTEM	HARTFORDCO COM 4000	CHASSIS	HOLLIS MARK X	MAXIMUM SPEED	64 KPH
T&T SYSTEM	HARTFORDCO XKZ 1	ARMAMENT	1 DONAL PPC	JUMP JETS	NONE
ARMOR	STARGUARD IV		6 MARTELL MEDIUM LASERS	JUMP CAPACITY	NONE
			2 SPERRYBROWNING MACHINE GUNS		
			1 HOLLY SHORT RANGE MISSILE 6 PACK		

Hanse often expressed an affinity for “lame-duck” ‘Mechs, designs of questionable reputation like the *Blackjack* and the *Rifleman*. This may be why, despite being given the opportunity to pilot an *Atlas* or a surviving Star League-era *Cyclops*, Hanse settled on the comparatively weaker *BattleMaster* early in his career. As even the stock *BattleMaster* was a superior command and control machine compared to most ‘Mechs, Hanse eschewed the more specialized variants that traded tonnage for further command capability, instead preferring the -1G, a combat-oriented model that best allowed him to bring his weight to bear when he felt a personal touch was required. His personal machine—originally named *Cadmus*, but later renamed *Dana*—bore no Star League technology, but was otherwise in perfect shape, a quality not to be underestimated during the logistics-starved era in which the First Prince fought.

Hanse’s son and successor Victor preferred other machines, and possessed a desire to escape his father’s shadow besides. After Hanse’s death, *Dana* was thus made the centerpiece of a war memorial on the grounds of the New Avalon Institute of Science. Heavily damaged during the Word of Blake’s initial bombardment of New Avalon during the Jihad, *Dana* was piloted to safety and served as the personal ride of several mid-ranking Davion officers during the long struggle for that world. Destroyed during the climatic Blakist assault in 3073 that temporarily secured them New Avalon, the Word did not know what they had, and *Dana*’s remains were found in a salvage warehouse when the Word evacuated the capital in 3074. Lovingly restored, it again served as a museum piece until the Kuritan occupation of New Avalon in 3146. Reports indicate that the Kuritan commander arranged to have the storied *BattleMaster* shipped back to Luthien as a war prize.



HANSE DAVION



POSITION/RANK

COORDINATOR

AFFILIATION/UNIT

DRACONIS COMBINE

BIRTH YEAR

2970

Much of Takashi Kurita's early life was spent immersed in the samurai ethic, as was expected of the heir to the throne of the Draconis Combine. Enrolled in the Sun Zhang Military Academy, Takashi graduated near the top of his class despite his father's request that his instructors drill his son more rigorously than any other cadet. After his graduation, Takashi received a posting to the Second Sword of Light and command of a lance on Marlowe's Rift, where he first traded shots with the Federated Suns. For the next seven years, Takashi displayed considerable talent, distinguishing himself as a warrior, tactician, and leader and eventually rising to command of the Second Sword's assault battalion.

Takashi ascended to the Chrysanthemum Throne when his father Hohiro was assassinated by a member of his personal bodyguard. Takashi ordered the assassin shot and hung by his feet until his bones dropped to the ground, but followed this by markedly reducing the levels of state oppression of the populace, which under his father's reign

had ratcheted up to a point notable even in the bloodstained history of the Combine. However, when rumors began spreading that his father's assassination had been committed with Takashi's acceptance or even connivance, he had those responsible—and not a few unrelated political opponents—rounded up and publicly executed.

His rule secured, Takashi turned his attention to the DCMS, implementing reforms that helped roll back several recent Federated Suns successes. When First Prince Hanse Davion landed on the world of Halstead Station in 3014 with an invasion force, Takashi eagerly took to the field once more. The Coordinator arrived in early February at the head of the Second Sword of Light and personally led the hunt for the Davion ruler. During the subsequent cat-and-mouse campaign, Takashi came away impressed with the cunning and intuition of "The Fox." The Suns forces managed a fighting withdrawal, but the Coordinator looked forward to more battles in the years to come.

A number of respected mercenary commands served the Combine during this period, none more notable than Wolf's Dragoons. The actions of a disreputable warlord caused the good relations between the Dragoons and the Combine to crumble, to Takashi's ignorance. Believing the Dragoons to have turned irrevocably against the Combine, he ordered DCMS forces to prevent the mercenaries from fleeing Combine space. After their failure—and Jaime Wolf's open insults to Takashi at the wedding of Hanse Davion and Melissa Steiner—Takashi was the subject of a blood feud by the Dragoons and in turn responded harshly against all mercenaries in general. He pursued this feud with a single-minded focus that cost the Combine dearly in the Fourth Succession War and beyond, though it was later determined that his judgment suffered from the debilitating effects of a blood clot in his brain.

Perhaps drawing from his history with his own father, he also fell into a cold war with his son, Theodore, though the latter's heroic actions in the Fourth Succession War did much to save the Combine's Lyran border. He named Theodore *Gunji-no-Kanrei* in 3031, leaving active military leadership in his son's hands, though he detested the military reforms Theodore instituted, given their departure from the samurai tradition. Having largely retired from personal combat by the Fourth Succession War, Takashi took to the field one last time during the Clan assault on Luthien. Fighting beside his handpicked Dragon's Claws (later renamed the Izanagi Warriors), he was instrumental in stopping a charge of Nova Cat OmniMechs nearing the Imperial Palace. On 15 September 3054, Takashi committed *seppuku* just prior to a scheduled honor duel between himself and Jaime Wolf.

BLR-1G BATTLEMASTER

POWER PLANT	VOX 340
COMM SYSTEM	HARTFORDCO COM 4000
T&T SYSTEM	HARTFORDCO XKZ 1
ARMOR	STARGUARD IV

MASS	85 TONS
CHASSIS	HOLLIS MARK X
ARMAMENT	1 DONAL PPC
	6 MARTELL MEDIUM LASERS
	2 SPERRYBROWNING MACHINE GUNS
	1 HOLLY SHORT RANGE MISSILE 6 PACK

CRUISING SPEED	43 KPH
MAXIMUM SPEED	64 KPH
JUMP JETS	NONE
JUMP CAPACITY	NONE

The Kuritas are a family older than the BattleMech, and so their rulers are not married to any one family machine. Perhaps the most well-known 'Mech in the Kuritan personal stable is a *BattleMaster*, a -1G produced in 2634 as one of the first off the line. The machine has seen combat on dozens of worlds and shed the blood of thousands. Takashi piloted it through the entire active phase of his career, helping lead the Second Sword of Light to victory over Lyran and Suns opponents alike.

Not even the ruling Houses were immune to the technological degradations of the Succession Wars; whatever advanced technology the *BattleMaster* might have once mounted was long since lost by the time Takashi took its controls. However, as a technological renaissance spread through the Inner Sphere, Takashi's 'Mech was one of the first machines in the Combine upgraded, with an ER PPC, double heat sinks, and extra armor installed.

These powerful upgrades were never tested in action, as they had teething issues that made the machine unreliable. Rather than going into battle with a 'Mech he did not trust, Takashi switched to a *Grand Dragon* for the battle of Luthien. While the *BattleMaster's* bugs were eventually worked out, Takashi died soon after, and after his death Theodore forged his own path, picking his own BattleMechs. The venerable *BattleMaster* cycled back into the Kuritan stable, sitting there largely untouched for decades, until Yori Kurita chose it as her personal BattleMech as part of an effort to link her rule to the ancient accomplishments of the Kurita family and shore up her shaky claim to the Chrysanthemum Throne.



**POSITION/RANK**

COLONEL

AFFILIATION/UNIT

WOLF'S DRAGOONS

BIRTH YEAR

2980

The son of Wolf Clan MechWarrior Jon Vickers and Brigit of the Merchant Caste, Jaime was born in the Wolf Clan enclave on Eden. Testing demonstrated superior reflexes and coordination combined with above-average intelligence, and so the young freeborn was accorded the honor of being trained for the warrior caste. In his Trial of Position, Jaime piloted an antiquated *Archer* to victory and earned his formal place as a MechWarrior of Clan Wolf.

Assigned to a garrison Cluster in 3000, Jaime distinguished himself in battle against a Nova Cat Trinary in a Trial of Possession on Circe, earning him the opportunity to be tested for a position in a front-line command. Defeating his opponent handily, Jaime assumed the rank of Star Commander in the 328th Assault Cluster and, after participating in victories over the Diamond Sharks on Paxton and the Jade Falcons on Eden, easily tested up to Star Captain.

When the Clans resolved to send a reconnaissance force to the Inner Sphere, Khan Ward offered

command to Star Captain Jaime and his younger brother, Joshua. The two accepted gladly, and in 3005, Wolf's Dragoons made their famous first appearance. Over the next two decades, Jaime toured the Inner Sphere with his regiments, assuming full command of the Dragoons when Joshua was killed in 3015 by Anton Marik in a massacre that also saw Wolf lose his first wife and his two daughters. During his tour, Wolf and his Dragoons built a reputation as the preeminent mercenaries of their time.

The loss of much of his family led Wolf to bury himself entirely in his work. This changed when the Dragoons entered the employ of House Kurita in 3023, and Jaime struck up a close friendship with Minobu Tetsuhara, the Dragoons' DCMS liaison officer. When the Dragoons' contract with the Combine devolved and then erupted into open warfare, Wolf was forced to fight against a man he viewed as a brother. Wolf led his Dragoons to victory over his friend in a terrible battle at Misery and swore a blood feud against the Combine for the mistreatment suffered by the Dragoons and Tetsuhara both. The resulting campaign between the Dragoons and numerous Combine regiments during the Fourth Succession War was titanic in scope. Suffering nearly seventy-five percent losses in some units, the Dragoons nonetheless reaped a much higher toll from the Combine forces they faced; the mercenaries are often credited with single-handedly holding the Federated Suns border.

When it appeared increasingly likely that the Clans would soon return to the Inner Sphere, Wolf was ordered to shift the Dragoons' allegiance from the culture of his birth to the Inner Sphere and prepare to help defend his new home. When the invasion began, he readied the Houses against the attackers and, at Hanse Davion's bequest, helped bring the combined Nova Cat and Smoke Jaguar invasion of Luthien to a halt. Afterwards, Wolf seemed withdrawn, moreso after his son Mackenzie's death during a mission in the Periphery, and the resulting leadership vacuum led to a civil war within the Dragoons that cost him his grandson as well.

Following that conflict's conclusion, Wolf increasingly turned day-to-day command of the unit over to subordinates, but never fully took his hand off the wheel. He continued as leader of the Dragoons in this fashion until, on 18 October 3067, mercenaries operating with the covert backing of the Word of Blake launched a devastating surprise attack against the unit. While eventually defeated, the violent and sudden free-for-all led to Jaime's death in battle and the near-destruction of the Dragoons in what many came to consider the beginning of the Jihad.

ARC-2W ARCHER

POWER PLANT	VOX 280	MASS	70 TONS	CRUISING SPEED	43 KPH
COMM SYSTEM	NEIL 9000	CHASSIS	EARTHWERKS ARCHER	MAXIMUM SPEED	64 KPH
T&T SYSTEM	RCA INSTATRAC MARK XII	ARMAMENT	2 DIVERSE OPTICS TYPE 18 MEDIUM LASERS	JUMP JETS	NONE
ARMOR	MAXIMILLIAN 100		2 DOOMBUD LONG RANGE MISSILE 20 RACKS 2 HOLLY-4 SRM PACKS	JUMP CAPACITY	NONE

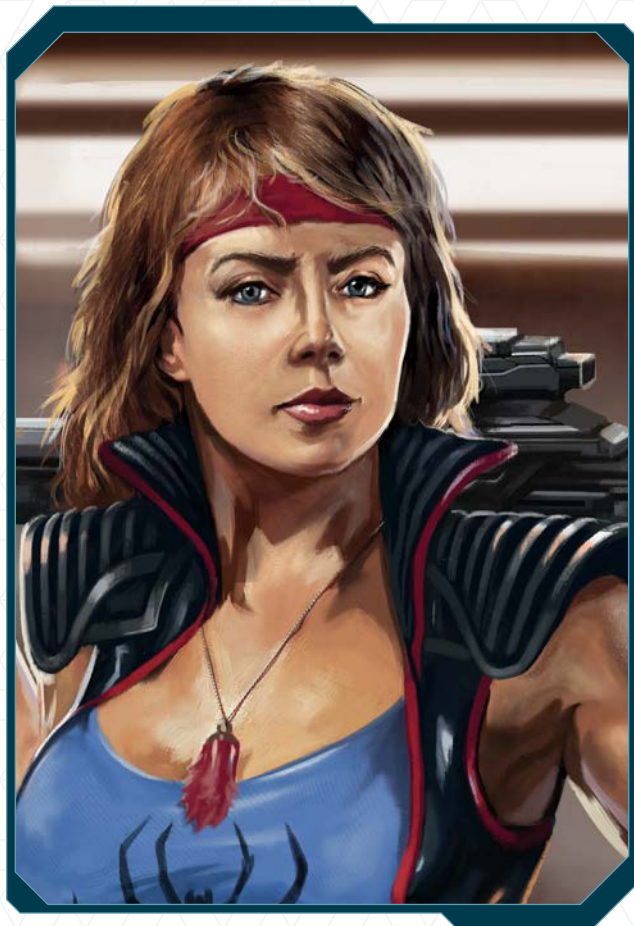
Wolf always had a fascination with this longtime fire support stalwart, reminiscing in interviews about playing with a model of one as a child. This childhood fascination was cemented when, in his Trial of Position, he was assigned to an *Archer*, piloting it to victory and securing his future.

An odd choice as a command ride, Wolf chose the machine out of personal attachment and a belief that his driving a 'Mech common among the Dragoons ranks would help endear him to his troops. Painted a distinctive blue and gold—just like the model of his youth—rather than the typical Dragoons colors, his *Archer* at first featured no Clan or even Star League technology, as preserving the secret of the Dragoons' origins was paramount. This led to a series of close calls, as trying battlefield conditions sometimes forced his 'Mech into shutdown in the midst of battle. His original machine was lost in an ammunition explosion during the 3023 campaign on Quentin IV. Eventually, with the recovery of the Helm Memory Core, he was able to add Star League technologies to the replacement and then, once the Dragoons' identity was revealed, ClanTech.

At first, Wolf's *Archer* matched all others in the Dragoons, following the unit's trademark -2W standard. Though most Dragoons *Archers* eventually adopted the -5W standard, Wolf instead refit his machine heavily with Clan technologies in a one-off custom configuration. It was this machine that Wolf died in during the 3067 fighting on Outreach. While the machine was restored and Wolf's surviving family were willing to see it adopted as the ride of the next Dragoons commander, no MechWarrior felt comfortable piloting a 'Mech so freighted with history. As such, it is immaculately preserved at the Dragoons'

home base. During ceremonies of remembrance, the highest-ranked Dragoons cadet is allowed to pilot it, a privilege fiercely fought over.





POSITION/RANK	COLONEL; KHAN
AFFILIATION/UNIT	WOLF'S DRAGOONS; CLAN WOLF
BIRTH YEAR	2973

The First Lady of Death. Queen of MechWarriors. The Queen of Spades. The Black Widow. Natasha Kerensky was called all of these things and more, for no one title could encompass all that she was.

Trueborn on Strana Mechty in 2973 as a mixture of the Kerensky line and various lines from Clan Widowmaker, Natasha proved herself a superior warrior from the beginning. She tested out handily, overcoming two warriors five years her senior. In 2995, just after Natasha earned the rank of Star Captain, she stunned Clan commanders and Kerensky Bloodhouse leaders by competing for a Kerensky Bloodname and emerging triumphant. Over the next ten years, she administered severe drubbings to the Smoke Jaguars (2997), Diamond Sharks (2998 and 3001), and the Jade Falcons (3002), and by 3003 commanded her own Cluster. At this point, however, her career began to stall. Her disdain for politics was a serious flaw in a system where advancement as a warrior meant concomitant

advancement and participation in politics, while her increasing renown as a warrior led rival Clans to stiffen their bidding until her Cluster was bid away. Natasha's very existence became an effective battle tactic, but one that always culminated in her removal from the field before the battle began.

In 3004, a scouting mission back to the Successor States was proposed, and the Wolf Clan was selected to mount it. The Clan created a unit, the Wolf Dragoons, and staffed it with dispensable warriors who would be sent to battle their way across the Inner Sphere, gathering valuable intelligence data. Bored by her enforced inactivity and attracted by the lure of adventure, Natasha successfully lobbied to be appointed to the expedition.

The Dragoons arrived in the Inner Sphere in 3005. Natasha immediately set about making a name for herself as a lethal MechWarrior, sultry femme fatale and, eventually, commander of the Dragoons' infamous Black Widow unit. Beautiful but distant, she was depicted in several novels and holoivid dramas and was the subject of many a romantic fantasy for MechWarriors across the Inner Sphere. A list of campaigns she participated in during her tour of the Inner Sphere is practically a checklist of significant Succession War conflicts in the immediate pre-Clan period: New Aragon, New Delos, Hesperus II, Hoff, Misery, Glenmora and Tsinghai, to name only a fraction.

Despite having spent most of the previous half-century building the legend of the Black Widow, when the Clans returned to the Inner Sphere Natasha rejoined them without hesitation. Forced to test out again to prove herself anew as a Clan MechWarrior, she defeated an incredible four opponents in her Trial of Position, returning to the Wolves as a Star Colonel. From there, she led Wolf Clan forces to major victories at Tamar and Satalice. Made saKhan of Clan Wolf in 3051, her rebirth as a warrior of Kerensky culminated in her ascension to full Khan of her Clan in 3052.

The Black Widow's final campaign was the Refusal War against the Jade Falcons in 3057, during which Natasha led one of the prongs of the Wolf offensive. Smashing the Falcons on Colmar, Baker 3 and Devin, Natasha Kerensky at last met her end on the desert world of Twycross, where an obscure Jade Falcon MechWarrior roasted her alive in her cockpit with a sustained jump jet blast.

WHM-6R WARHAMMER

BLACK LADY

POWER PLANT	VOX 280	MASS	70 TONS	CRUISING SPEED	43 KPH
COMM SYSTEM	O/P 3000 COMSET	CHASSIS	STARCORPS 100	MAXIMUM SPEED	64 KPH
T&T SYSTEM	LOREM IPSUM	ARMAMENT	2 DONAL PPCS	JUMP JETS	NONE
ARMOR	O/P 1500 ARB		2 MARTELL MEDIUM LASERS	JUMP CAPACITY	NONE
			2 MAGNA SMALL LASERS		
			1 HOLLY SHORT RANGE MISSILE 6 PACK		
			2 SPERRYBROWNING MACHINE GUNS		

Natasha's covert deployment to the Inner Sphere meant bidding farewell to the flexibility of the OmniMech. Deliberately setting out to make a name for herself, she decided to pick a single, multi-purpose 'Mech, the better to build a singular identity that friends and enemies alike could fixate on. Initially

this machine was a well-preserved *Marauder*, hauled out of a Brian Cache and brought along to the Inner Sphere, but this 'Mech was lost to the Bounty Hunter in 3014. Natasha then switched to a *Warhammer*-6R, which she piloted for the remainder of her days as an Inner Sphere warrior. It was this 'Mech more than any other that came to be associated with the Black Widow legend. The 'Mech became so iconic, in fact, that out-of-the-way facilities offered custom *Warhammer* paint jobs for those pilots determined to have the same look and willing to risk the wrath of the Widow (or her many enemies).

Much like Gray Noton, Natasha's incredible skill at her 'Mech's controls led to rumors of Star League technology as the real source of her prowess. In Natasha's case, the unknown origins of the Dragoons further fed these rumors. When the Dragoons were revealed as a Clan reconnaissance unit, a host of defeated MechWarriors claimed that the Black Widow had "cheated" her way to victory via her *Warhammer's* Clan ER PPCs. In reality, Jaime Wolf was well aware how easy it was to lose a 'Mech on the battlefield to a curious enemy, and so strictly forbade the use of Star League—let alone Clan—technologies in the field until such technologies were widely available elsewhere. As such, Natasha's *Warhammer*, like her prior *Marauder*, was well-maintained but otherwise bone-stock.

Natasha abandoned her *Warhammer* when she returned to the Clans. Her battalion preserved it for her should she ever return, but it vanished in the chaos surrounding the assault on Outreach in the opening salvo of the Jihad.



NATASHA KERENSKY



POSITION/RANK	TAI-SHO (DRACONIS COMBINE MUSTERED SOLDIERY)
AFFILIATION/UNIT	DRACONIS COMBINE
BIRTH YEAR	2992

Son of eminent samurai Minoru Tetsuhara, Minobu was a loyal MechWarrior in the Second Sword of Light, the best-reputed regiment in the Draconis Combine Mustered Soldiery. He seemed destined to serve out his career in this fashion as a skilled but otherwise unremarkable warrior, until fate took a hand.

Tetsuhara's rise to prominence, ironically, was facilitated by his humiliation after facing Wolf's Dragoons in battle on Dromini VI in 3021, near the end of the Third Succession War. His reconnaissance company located an overheated, near-crippled *Archer* following a pitched skirmish and—refusing to destroy a helpless and evidently skilled MechWarrior—under his orders, the company let it return to its comrades. The *Archer* turned out to belong to Colonel Jaime Wolf himself. While honor is said to be cherished above all in the DCMS, honor is a concept with many interpretations. Once it was learned who Minobu had let escape, the Coordinator himself at once promoted Tetsuhara and removed him from service

in the Second Sword, a move viewed as both a reward for his honorable actions and a slap in the face for letting the chance for victory on Dromini slip away and—just as importantly—failing to prevent the DCMS from being defeated by mere mercenaries. Tetsuhara was not recalled to service until 3023—as the DCMS's new Professional Soldiery Liaison to Wolf's Dragoons, just hired by the Combine.

It was in this new role that Minobu regained his sense of honor, both in his own eyes and the eyes of his superiors. Pleased with his handling of the Dragoons, the Coordinator decreed the creation of a regiment to train alongside the Dragoons and learn their skills: the Ryuken—the Dragon's Sword. Recruited from across the Combine, under Tetsuhara's guidance the Ryuken slowly built their numbers, first to a regiment and eventually to four, working in concert with the Dragoons. During this time Tetsuhara once again saved Jaime Wolf's life, during a battle on Quentin IV. Minobu was injured in an assassination attempt during a 3026 raid on the Davion world of Barlow's End, spending long months recovering and adapting to the prostheses necessitated by his injuries.

Though the Dragoons were skilled and honorable warriors, reliance on mercenaries of any caliber chafed on many senior Combine military leaders. Tetsuhara was frequently drawn into conflict between the Dragoons and the machinations of the Warlord of Galedon, Grieg Samsonov, who sought to break or humble the mercenaries. When tensions between the mercenaries and the Combine finally erupted into open conflict, Samsonov named Tetsuhara commander of a task force consisting of the four Ryuken regiments plus supporting units and ordered him to destroy the Dragoons in combat on the frozen world of Misery. Despite his distaste for his orders and his fondness for Wolf and the Dragoons, Tetsuhara obeyed the dictates of honor and sent his forces against the mercenaries. Tetsuhara fought bravely and intelligently despite Samsonov's deliberate failure to back him properly, battering the Dragoons in a brutal, month-long campaign before the mercenaries at last achieved victory.

Captured at the campaign's close, Tetsuhara could not live with his disgrace, and on 27 May 3028 committed *seppuku* to atone for his failure to the Coordinator. Jaime Wolf honored his fallen friend by serving as *kaishaku-nin* during Tetsuhara's *seppuku* ceremony and, at the wedding of Hanse Davion and Melissa Steiner, dumped Tetsuhara's bloody swords at the feet of the Coordinator himself. Tetsuhara's faithful aide, Michi Noketsuna, swore vengeance in his master's name, eventually hunting down and executing Samsonov some years later. Tetsuhara's children would eventually join Wolf's Dragoons.

PNT-9R *PANTHER*

KATANA KAT

POWER PLANT	LEENEX 140
COMM SYSTEM	SIPHER COMMCN CSU-4
T&T SYSTEM	CAT'S EYES 5
ARMOR	MAXMILLIAN 42

MASS	35 TONS
CHASSIS	ALSHAIN 56-CARRIER
ARMAMENT	1 TELOS-4 SHORT RANGE MISSILE DELIVERY SYSTEM 1 LORD'S LIGHT PPC

CRUISING SPEED	43 KPH
MAXIMUM SPEED	64 KPH
JUMP JETS	LExINGTON LIFTERS
JUMP CAPACITY	120 METERS

Minobu Tetsuhara's preferred 'Mech was a PNT-9R *Panther*, known as *Katana Kat*. The *Kat* was an heirloom 'Mech, handed down from generation to generation. Though the machine was the Tetsuhara family legacy, Minobu spent comparatively little time at its controls: following his disgrace after the

affair on Dromini IV, Minobu was forced to relinquish the 'Mech to his brother, Fuhito Tetsuhara, where it performed yeoman service in the Fourth Succession War, Ronin War, and War of 3039.

The *Kat* survived all these conflicts and continued down through the family line, by the Jihad era serving in the Ninth Sword of Light regiment. It changed state allegiance but not family when that regiment joined the Republic of the Sphere. In the thirty-second century, Katana Tormark was heir to the Tetsuhara clan and owned the *Kat*. However, during her campaigns as leader of the Dragon's Fury she piloted other 'Mechs instead, loaning *Katana Kat* to Brotherhood MechWarrior Abeda Measho for a time. When Tormark chose to back the Nova Cats in their ill-fated rebellion, her wealth and property became forfeit. Following the rebellion's defeat, *Katana Kat* was seized as a war prize and gifted to a distant but still-loyal scion of the Tetsuhara clan, Orestes Tetsuhara, a veteran in the Second Genyosha. Orestes piloted the *Kat* with distinction during the invasion of the Federated Suns, seeing action on New Avalon and elsewhere.

Over the decades, the *Kat* has been regularly upgraded with modern technology. Refit in the mid-3050s to a -10KA and a generation later to a -10K2, just prior to the invasion of the Federated Suns it was brought up to the new -12KCD standard, leaving the centuries-old machine with cutting-edge capabilities.



**POSITION/RANK**

COLONEL; GRAND DUKE

AFFILIATION/UNIT

THE KELL HOUNDS; ARC-ROYAL

BIRTH YEAR

2986

Arthur Luvon, the husband of Archon Katrina Steiner, was an extremely wealthy man. He was also the cousin of Morgan Kell. After Morgan saved Katrina and Arthur from the wrath of Archon Alessandro Steiner at the turn of the thirty-first century, Arthur was most grateful. Upon his death in August 3010, the Kells inherited a great deal of money, which they decided to use to realize their dream of commanding a mercenary unit. Initially derided by some as a rich boy playing soldier—despite having graduated from the Nagelring—Morgan Kell demonstrated time and time again that his skill as a MechWarrior and commander made him one of the finest military personages of the Inner Sphere.

In November 3010, the new Kell Hounds regiment took to the field, seeing brief combat on the Marik border. Switching to Davion service, Morgan was on Mallory's World when Prince Ian Davion died. The battle marked Morgan's first encounter with

Yorinaga Kurita, the MechWarrior who killed the First Prince. Meeting again on Mallory's World in 3016, a legendary duel saw Yorinaga retreat from the planet and Morgan retreat from life. For eleven years, Morgan ruminated in a monastery on Zaniah, only reemerging when his brother Patrick, who had taken command of the Hounds in Morgan's absence, was killed by Yorinaga. The feud between the Kell Hounds and Yorinaga's Genyosha continued through the Fourth Succession War and only ended after another duel and Yorinaga's death in 3029.

The next two decades were somewhat anticlimactic for Morgan. Archon Katrina's bequest to Morgan upon her death in 3040 allowed him to expand the Hounds to two regiments, but things were largely quiet until 3049. In that year, a battalion of the Hounds hunting pirates in the Periphery ran into the vanguard of Clan Wolf. In the resulting battle, Morgan lost not just his battalion, but also his son, Phelan Kell. Despite this blow, Morgan rallied the Hounds and led them in the early victory over the Jade Falcons at Twycross. Later dispatched by First Prince Hanse Davion to prevent the fall of Luthien, Morgan accounted for numerous OmniMech kills during the Inner Sphere victory on the Kuritan capital.

As the years rolled on, Morgan became more and more an administrator and politician rather than a MechWarrior. Made a Grand Duke, Morgan gave up his command after the Clan Invasion. His beloved wife Salome was killed by the same assassin's bomb that took Archon Melissa Steiner in 3055, and Morgan himself was gravely injured, losing an arm in the blast. Forming the Arc-Royal Defense Cordon shortly after Katherine Steiner-Davion seceded the Lyran half of the Federated Commonwealth, he gave permanent shelter to the Wolves-in-Exile at the climax of the Refusal War. He briefly came out of retirement to assist Victor Steiner-Davion in his quest to overthrow his sister Katherine, personally convincing Peter Steiner-Davion to return from exile and assume the Lyran throne.

During the Jihad, Morgan remained on Arc-Royal. No longer able to lead the Hounds in battle due to extensive inner ear damage from a latent infection, he focused on governing Arc-Royal and the other worlds of the cordon. Repeated attempts by the Word of Blake to invade, poison, and bomb Arc-Royal into oblivion wore the Grand Duke down, but his sense of responsibility kept him at the helm and striving to provide aid and shelter to the enemies of the Word.

In 3083, Morgan Kell died in his sleep, perhaps finally attaining the peace he sacrificed when he left Zaniah over fifty years earlier. His title and command of the Kell Hounds passed to his daughter, Caitlin.

ARC-2R ARCHER

POWER PLANT	OX 280	MASS	70 TONS	CRUISING SPEED	43 KPH
COMM SYSTEM	NEIL 9000	CHASSIS	EARTHWERKS ARCHER	MAXIMUM SPEED	64 KPH
T&T SYSTEM	RCA INSTATRAC MARK XII	ARMAMENT	4 DIVERSE OPTICS TYPE 18 MEDIUM LASERS	JUMP JETS	NONE
ARMOR	MAXIMILLIAN 100	2 DOOMBUD LONG RANGE MISSILE 20 RACKS		JUMP CAPACITY	NONE

Morgan Kell favored an *Archer* even after he could afford to choose his 'Mech. Unlike many MechWarriors with a fat bank balance and a surplus of technical support, Morgan was never particularly interested in customizing his BattleMech: the stock

Archer -2R he inherited served his needs admirably, and continued to do so for many years. His *Archer* was of no special pedigree; it was less than a century old, and so was relatively new compared to many of its Third Succession War contemporaries.

However, Morgan always placed a great deal of emphasis on having a technological edge over his opponents, famously building a base of the best techs and astechs available on Galatea for his new unit even before hiring a single MechWarrior. Morgan's *Archer* eventually moved up to the cutting edge of technology around the time of the Battle of Luthien, when it received a series of ClanTech and Star League upgrades, thanks to the increasing proliferation of Star League technology and battlefield salvage from the ongoing Clan Invasion. Replacing the LRM launchers with Clan equivalents, the machine also used Clan double heat sinks. This allowed the *Archer* to add more armor, more ammunition, CASE, Artemis IV, and a salvaged Clan active probe in the head, to allow Morgan to better direct a battle. Even without these upgrades, Morgan's preternatural—some would say supernatural—skill enabled the 'Mech to more than hold its own against the best the Nova Cats and Smoke Jaguars had to offer.

While the Hounds were desperate to preserve their founder's BattleMech, the Jade Falcons' orbital bombardment of Arc-Royal reduced the *Archer*, along with so much else on the world, to slag.



**POSITION/RANK**

COLONEL

AFFILIATION/UNIT

GRAY DEATH LEGION

BIRTH YEAR

3004

That Grayson Death Carlyle was one of the great captains of history no one, even his enemies, would deny. But in the end, it would not be this quality for which he was best remembered. Carlyle founded his own unit on Trell I in 3024, following a planetary invasion that began with the death of his father and shattering of the family mercenary unit. Grayson turned a tragedy in the making into a stunning victory thanks to a genius for rapid and creative improvisation. Betrayed from within, his base of operations overrun from without, outnumbered and on the run, Carlyle rallied disparate and disheartened elements, including enemy mercenaries, and managed to drive the Kuritan invasion force off-world. Renaming his unit the Gray Death Legion, he next took his scratch force to Verthandi, a Lyran world recently ceded to the Combine, and in a brilliant guerrilla war drove off that garrison as well.

While these actions were impressive and helped ensure that the Legion would not crumble as so many other new mercenary groups did, it was their actions on Helm that ensured they would forever be remembered. Given a temporary landhold there by Janos Marik in exchange for offensive operations against the Capellan Confederation, Carlyle and his troops discovered an

intact Star League library core, one containing data on ancient technology lost to the savagery of the Succession Wars. Saving the Helm Memory Core from an attempt by ComStar to destroy it and preserve their technological monopoly, Carlyle had copies of the core distributed far and wide, showing he cared more for humanity as a whole than momentary political advantage.

After fighting across more than a half-dozen worlds in the Fourth Succession War, the Legion saw brief service in the War of 3039 before settling down to a quiet period of growth and garrison duty. The long peace in no way dulled Carlyle's gifts for rapid adaptation and unorthodox tactics, however, and these served him in good stead when the Legion first encountered the technologically superior forces of the Clans. Though by this point the Legion had grown to a full regiment, Carlyle was flexible enough to realize that attempting to fight the invaders head-on was suicide, a lesson many other Inner Sphere units only learned too late. Surviving a harrowing anabasis on Sudeten, Carlyle retooled his approach and built on the infantry anti-'Mech tactics for which his unit was already famous, becoming the father of Inner Sphere battle armor and handing the Clans an atypically early defeat on Pandora with Inner Sphere battlesuits fresh from the NAIS. Proving that the Clans could be beaten only further cemented his reputation among the citizens of the Inner Sphere.

An unremarkable man in appearance, Carlyle gained the loyalty of his warriors through his fierce loyalty to them. Carlyle always put the needs of his people above his own. It was this trait that endeared him to Lori Kalmar, a MechWarrior Carlyle fought on Trell who eventually married him. They had a son, Alexander, in July 3036. Carlyle saw his dedication to duty and service to the Federated Commonwealth rewarded in 3056, being made a baron and given a landhold on the planet Glengarry, in Skye. Absent during the initial phases of the Second Skye Rebellion, Carlyle returned in time to save his son and the remainder of the Legion from Skye rebels during that grinding campaign. Further action the following year on Caledonia saw him almost killed, and his ability to pilot a 'Mech lost. Reluctantly, Carlyle wholly settled into the role of administrator and Old Man of the Legion, a role he played dutifully but without enthusiasm until 3065, when he developed an especially aggressive form of cancer; he would not live to see the death of his wife and the destruction of his unit that same year on Hesperus II.

Though his innovative tactics and operational maneuvers are still studied to this day, his primary legacy was not as a commander or as the creator of a notable fighting unit, but for delivering a higher standard of living for everyone in the Inner Sphere. The technological renaissance he unleashed with the recovery, safeguarding, and dissemination of what has also become known as the Gray Death Memory Core spread from world to world and continues to benefit people across hundreds of light years, even decades after his death.

MAD-3R MARAUDER

POWER PLANT	VLAR 300	MASS	75 TONS	CRUISING SPEED	43 KPH
COMM SYSTEM	DALBAN MICRONICS	CHASSIS	GM MARAUDER	MAXIMUM SPEED	64 KPH
T&T SYSTEM	DALBAN HI-REZ	ARMAMENT	2 MAGNA HELLSTAR PPCS	JUMP JETS	NONE
ARMOR	VALIANT LAMELLOR		2 MAGNA MK II MEDIUM LASER	JUMP CAPACITY	NONE
			1 GM WHIRLWIND AC/5		

Unlike many mercenary leaders, and even though he piloted one machine for the vast majority of his career, Grayson Carlyle was never identified with what one would call a signature 'Mech. Initially fond of the SHD-2H *Shadow Hawk*, a 'Mech that belonged to his father's old unit, on Verthandi he switched to a captured Kuritan -3R *Marauder*, enjoying the notable command and control abilities of that legendary heavy 'Mech. Once the Legion relocated to Helm, Carlyle had extra armor added to protect the rotation ring between the chassis and leg assembly, and at the notoriously vulnerable linkage for the dorsal autocannon. Other than these minor modifications, the machine was a stock model. Carlyle piloted this *Marauder* for twenty-five years, but never had the chance to upgrade it with Star League technology: it was destroyed by the Jade Falcons on Sudeten in 3050. Although the 'Mech was later recovered, from that point forward he used a VTR-9D *Victor*, a 'Mech that served him faithfully until its destruction during the campaign for Caledonia and the end of Carlyle's career as a MechWarrior.



GRAYSON CARLYLE

**POSITION/RANK**SOLARIS VII GRAND TOURNAMENT
CHAMPION, 3027; INTELLIGENCE SECRETARY**AFFILIATION/UNIT**

TENG STABLES; FEDERATED COMMONWEALTH

BIRTH YEAR

2990

Though a citizen of the Federated Suns, Justin was born and raised on the Capellan capital of Sian during his father's tenure as ambassador to the Capellan Confederation. Returning to the Suns, he eventually graduated from Sakhara Academy and was assigned a post in the Fifth Davion Guards RCT.

While stationed on Spica in 3017, the planet was invaded by the Capellans. During the battle, Justin helped rescue the Fifth's command staff and unknowingly faced off with the Capellan invasion's leader, Candace Liao. Their duel ended with Candace's 'Mech gravely damaged; soon after, the Capellan forces withdrew from the planet. For his leadership and daring during the campaign, Justin was rewarded by First Prince Hanse Davion with the Diamond Sunburst.

In 3026 Justin was assigned to Kittery and given command of the newly formed First Kittery Training Battalion. During a training exercise, his unit was ambushed by a battalion of Capellan raiders. Realizing his cadets were being herded, Allard pulled

back, only to find a heavy 'Mech waiting for him. The enemy 'Mech turned out to be a *Rifleman* (which, unknown to Justin, was piloted by Solaris Champion Gray Noton) that eventually gained the upper hand in the resulting duel. The battle cost Justin both his 'Mech and his left forearm, the latter being replaced with cybernetics. Despite his heroic stand, allegations were made that he had been working with Capellan insurgents. The court ruled him guilty: he was stripped of all honors and titles and exiled from the Federated Suns.

Justin subsequently travelled to Solaris VII, joined the Capellan-favoring Teng Stables, and began racking up victories. Taking advantage of his resulting fame, he constantly made furious pro-Capellan and anti-Davion statements, railing against the injustice done to him and eventually even killing the most prominent Davion champion in battle. All this brought him to the attention of Capellan intelligence, which recruited Justin into its ranks. His proven ability and the pressures of the Fourth Succession War shot him up the Maskirovka chain of command, but at the close of that war it was demonstrated that Justin's trial and exile were faked and that he was in fact a double agent, working for Davion intelligence. His position within the Maskirovka allowed him to misdirect Capellan activities and warn the Suns about operations he was unable to derail. His narrow escape from Sian, accompanied by the Duchess of St. Ives, Candace Liao (and by extension, the St. Ives Commonality) and the destruction of Warrior House Imarra, put a capstone on one of the most dramatic intelligence operations in the Inner Sphere since the Snow Fire affair.

After the war Justin worked openly for Davion intelligence. When intelligence failures became a major contributor to House Davion's defeat in the War of 3039, his father stepped down from the position of Intelligence Secretary of the Federated Commonwealth and Justin took his place. Marrying Candace Liao, he had two daughters and two sons. He proved a capable intelligence chief, implementing reforms that began forging the disparate Steiner and Davion intelligence services together. Nonetheless, like all intelligence professionals he was blindsided by Operation Revival and the return of the Clans. Doing his best to cope with the resulting chaos, on 5 January 3052 he was assassinated by agents of Romano Liao in revenge for all the damage he had done to the Confederation a generation prior. He lived long enough to see his son, Kai Allard-Liao, become a legend throughout both Clan and Inner Sphere society, and his wife would avenge his death in turn by assassinating Romano shortly thereafter.

VLK-QA VALKYRIE

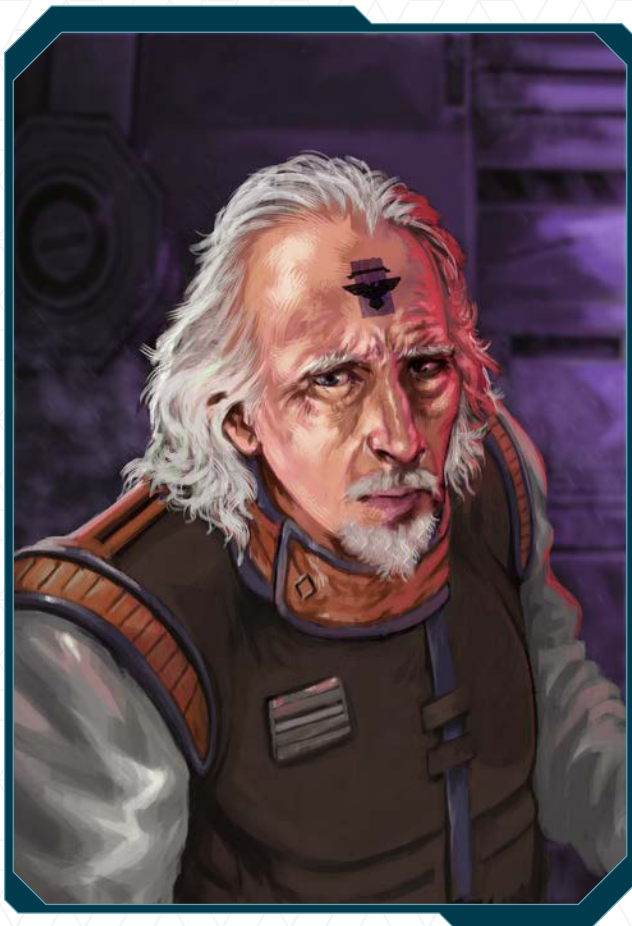
POWER PLANT	OMNI 150	MASS	30 TONS	CRUISING SPEED	54 KPH
COMM SYSTEM	LYNX-SHUR	CHASSIS	COREAN MODEL 1AA	MAXIMUM SPEED	86 KPH
T&T SYSTEM	SYNC-TRACKER (39-42071)	ARMAMENT	1 SUTEL IX MEDIUM LASER	JUMP JETS	NORSE INDUSTRIES 3S
ARMOR	RIESE 470		1 DEVASTATOR SERIES-7 LRM 10	JUMP CAPACITY	150 METERS

Though his most famous 'Mech was his Solaris mount, the *Centurion* known as *Yen-Lo-Wang*, Justin Allard piloted several BattleMechs during his career. He had no family 'Mech, and in his early days piloted whatever the Armed Forces of the Federated Suns deemed worthy of issuing him. During the Spica campaign he drove a much-maligned *Blackjack*. On Kittery, however, he was in charge of a light training battalion and as a result was issued the Federated Suns' finest light BattleMech, a *Valkyrie*, on loan from the Kittery Borderers. The stock -QA model, it was in decent condition and only a century old. Though heavy for a light 'Mech, it was a light 'Mech all the same, and when Justin faced off against one of history's greatest MechWarriors, Gray Noton, he was forced to push his machine to its limit merely to survive. To his credit, he managed to use the *Valkyrie*'s superior mobility to inflict a decent amount of damage on Noton's substantially heavier *Rifleman*, but in the end tonnage told, and Justin and his machine both were crippled.

As the *Valkyrie* was still in production in Federated Suns space, spare parts were reasonably available. Though Justin soon left the training battalion, his wrecked *Valkyrie* was patched up and put back into service like so many other Succession War machines. By the time it was repaired, Justin's secret mission had been revealed to all and his fame ensured, and this led to a clamor in the Borderers to pilot the 'Mech. It was eventually rebuilt to the modernized -QD standard and reserved for the commander of the unit's scouting elements. The 'Mech served in this fashion for almost forty years, before being smashed along with the Borderers as a whole by the Word of Blake on Kittery in 3068.



JUSTIN ALLARD

**POSITION/RANK**

CAPTAIN-GENERAL

AFFILIATION/UNIT

FREE WORLDS LEAGUE

BIRTH YEAR

2957

Eldest son of Captain-General Stephan Marik, Janos was born into a Free Worlds League rent by internal dissension. The young Janos was determined to do something about this, and create a strong and united League. Graduating from Oriente's Princefield Academy in 2984, Janos was commissioned as a First Lieutenant in the Free Worlds Guards and presented with a *Rifleman* BattleMech by his father.

Though the Third Succession War is often painted as a stagnant period of isolated raids and minor spats, this era saw the League engaged in constant and heavy fighting. Captain-General Stephan was at once a leader of aggressive character, and someone determined to bring Parliament to heel. Both attitudes encouraged conflict, as the invasions he launched were matched in turn by counterassaults by both the Lyran and the Capellans, who sought to take advantage of an increasingly paralytic Free Worlds defense structure.

Stationed on the Lyran front at this time, Janos was immersed in the thick of years of prolonged fighting. He experienced the problems the schism between

Captain-General and Parliament were causing first-hand: shortfalls of spare parts, technical support, medical supplies, and even ammunition. In 2988, Jefferson Clintock, a young officer in the First Orloff Grenadiers, approached Janos, attempting to recruit him into a plot to overthrow Parliament and install a military government. Janos denounced him and his co-conspirators immediately, convinced that the situation was salvageable and unable to fathom rebelling against the institutions of the League. Promoted to command of the Atrean Hussars as a reward, Janos' regiment spent more time combating general strikes, terrorism, rioting, and anti-government violence than it did Lyran raiders, but nonetheless saw combat several times, leading raids on Zavijava and Denebola, as well as a failed counterattack on Callison. Janos proved to be a competent though not outstanding MechWarrior, scoring several kills but never making it to Marksman status. However, most of his campaigns made for good publicity, and the general perception amongst the people of the League was that he was a hero.

Cancer claimed Stephan Marik's life in 2991, and the thirty-three-year-old Janos was subsequently confirmed as Captain-General of the Free Worlds League. Janos was optimistic for the future. Married, popular, with seven strong children and in good health himself, at his side was his brother Anton, with whom he had shared his plans for a revitalized League. By 3016, the Captain-General was a changed man. The failure of his plans to centralize and reinvigorate the League, a string of personal losses (including two wives and three children), and the treason of not only his brother Anton but also of one of his own sons all combined to transform Janos into a bitter old man. The necessity of allying himself with Maximilian Liao, Chancellor of the hated Capellan Confederation and known inciter of his brother's revolt, was also a bitter pill, but the threat posed by the newly-formed Steiner-Davion alliance left him no choice. The internal divisions created by Anton's Rebellion and Janos' own personal spite prevented the League from making any significant contributions to its partners in the Concord of Kapteyn during the brief Fourth Succession War.

After his family's betrayals, Janos grew ever more distrustful. With the ambitious Duggan Marik and Duncan Marik positioning themselves for their own grabs at the office of Captain-General, Janos secretly designated his son, Thomas, as his heir. A member of ComStar, Thomas was far removed from the intrigues that bubbled just beneath the surface on Atreus.

After Janos suffered a debilitating major stroke in 3030, Thomas Marik was recalled from ComStar to rule in his father's place. Janos was killed in the 3035 bomb attack that also claimed his son Duggan and seriously wounded Thomas.

RFL-3N RIFLEMAN [MODIFIED]

POWER PLANT	PITBAN 240	MASS	60 TONS	CRUISING SPEED	43 KPH
COMM SYSTEM	GARRET T11-A	CHASSIS	KALLON TYPE IV	MAXIMUM SPEED	64 KPH
T&T SYSTEM	GARRET D2J	ARMAMENT	2 MAGNA MK. III LARGE LASERS	JUMP JETS	NONE
ARMOR	KALLON ROYALSTAR		2 IMPERATOR SMOOTHIE-2 AUTOCANNONS	JUMP CAPACITY	NONE

The *Rifleman* that Janos' father gifted him was a brand-new machine, fresh off the line at Thermopolis, with no proud Marik legacy or battle history. It was a surprisingly light machine for the heir to the Captain-Generalcy, and decidedly under-armored besides, leading to numerous morbid jokes concerning Stephan's appreciation for his son. As the two were estranged, this may have been more accurate than people knew.

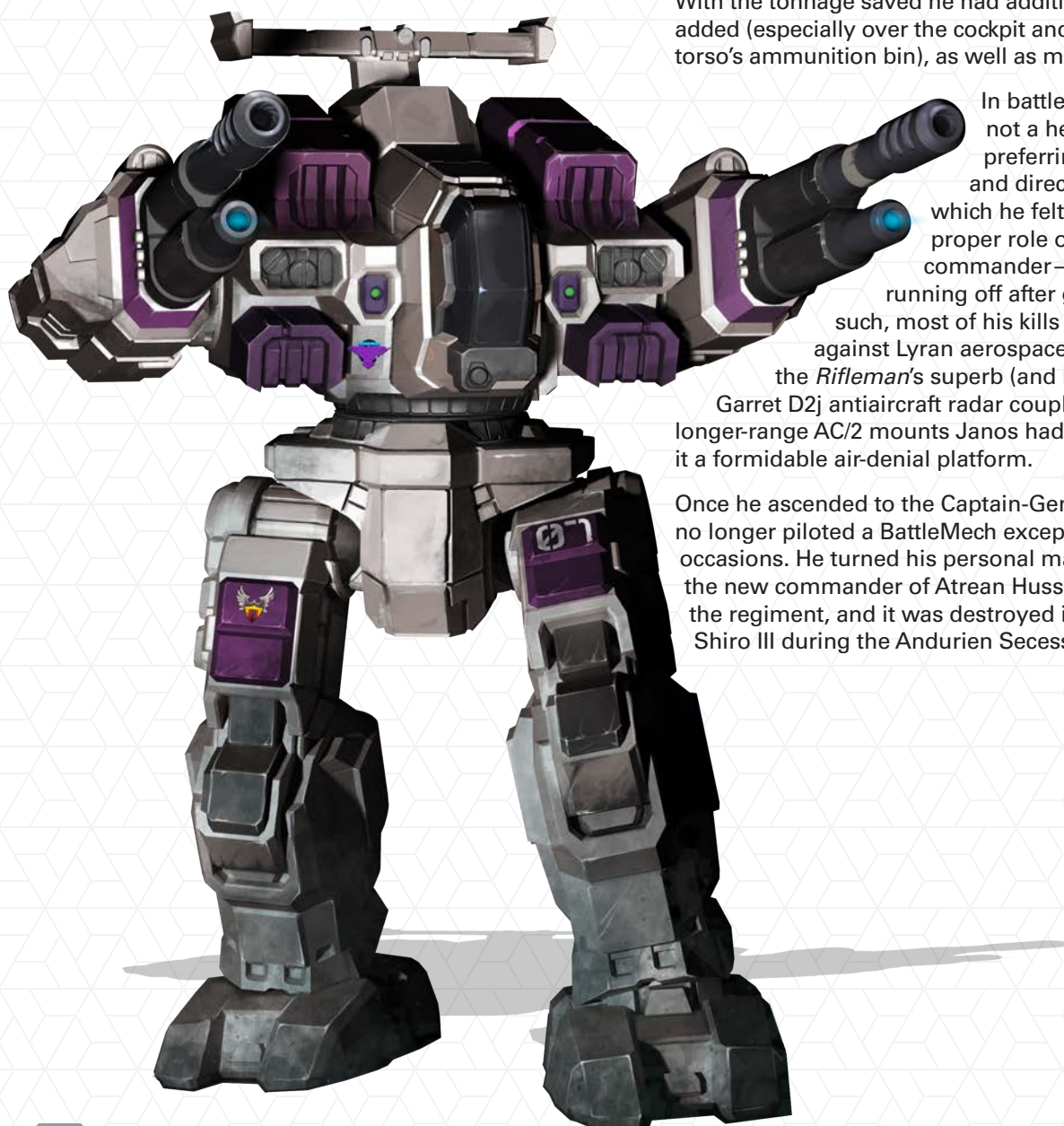
Regardless of his new 'Mech's vulnerability and comparatively light weight, Janos was determined to make it his own, refusing to give his father the satisfaction of using his own authority to requisition something more appropriate. If this was how the Captain-General thought it best to treat the future of the League, Janos would say, so be it. Janos did make some revisions, however, switching the AC/5s for AC/2s and stripping out the medium lasers altogether. With the tonnage saved he had additional armor added (especially over the cockpit and the center torso's ammunition bin), as well as more heat sinks.

In battle Janos was not a heedless attacker, preferring to sit back and direct matters—which he felt was the proper role of a regimental commander—rather than running off after glory. As

such, most of his kills actually came against Lyran aerospace fighters, as the *Rifleman's* superb (and mint condition)

Garret D2j anti-aircraft radar coupled with the longer-range AC/2 mounts Janos had installed made it a formidable air-denial platform.

Once he ascended to the Captain-Generalcy, Janos no longer piloted a BattleMech except on ceremonial occasions. He turned his personal machine over to the new commander of Atrean Hussars after leaving the regiment, and it was destroyed in the debacle on Shiro III during the Andurien Secession.





POSITION/RANK TAI-SA (DRACONIS COMBINE MUSTERED SOLDIER)

AFFILIATION/UNIT DRACONIS COMBINE

BIRTH YEAR 2980

A distant cousin of the Coordinator, Yorinaga Kurita was a feared and skilled warrior, one whose rigid honor, outstanding battlefield successes, and distinguished bloodline seemed to mark him for inevitable ascension to be a Warlord of the Draconis Combine. The same inflexible sense of honor that led him to such heights, however, would also prove to be his downfall.

Yorinaga graduated from the Sun Zhang MechWarrior Academy at 21 into a position with the prestigious Second Sword of Light, known as the Coordinator's Own. He rapidly made his mark in the interminable, innumerable border skirmishes marking the latter days of the Third Succession War, soon moving up to company command and then, in 3008, to command of the unit's second battalion.

In 3013, the Combine dropped two regiments of 'Mechs, including the Second Sword, onto Mallory's World. In response, First Prince Ian Davion himself led reinforcements to the planet. The resulting battles saw Davion forces outfought and Prince Ian and his troops isolated. Again and again the Second Sword advanced, and again and again the Prince and his

rearguard held them off. But at last, on 21 October, the Prince and his guard were cornered in a narrow defile. He ordered his troops to fall back, and held the pass himself.

After the Prince smashed a lance of the Combine's best, Yorinaga arrived on the scene and ordered his own men to hold; he advanced alone, to grant the First Prince a warrior's death in honorable single combat. Shattering the Prince's cockpit, he killed the ruler of the Federated Suns, achieving the dream of every MechWarrior—to slay a House Lord in battle. However, he was prevented from claiming the First Prince's body by the sudden intervention of the Kell Hounds, who drove Yorinaga and his men back, a check that galled the Kuritan commander. Nonetheless, he was still richly rewarded for his achievement, promoted to command of the Second Sword.

The Coordinator ordered him back to Mallory's World in 3016, this time heading a task force five regiments strong—an impressive assemblage for that period of history. Managing to isolate the defenders, he led his Second Sword against a mere battalion of the Kell Hounds. What followed is among the most legendary duels in history. Morgan Kell and Yorinaga Kurita met in single combat before the arrayed forces of both sides, the winner deciding the battle. Yorinaga once again proved himself the superior MechWarrior, dropping Kell's *Archer* to his knees. At this point what happened is unclear, the stuff of speculation and myth for decades. All that is known for certain is that Yorinaga failed to land a single hit with two consecutive alpha strikes at point-blank range against a nearly immobile target and, in response, Kell executed a bow with his ungainly *Archer*. Perceiving himself defeated, Yorinaga threw his swords out of his cockpit and abandoned not just the attack but Mallory's World entirely. In response, he was denied the privilege of committing *seppuku*, stripped of his rank, and exiled to a monastery.

The shamed MechWarrior was left in exile until, in 3027, the Coordinator ordered him to train a new unit, imbuing it with Yorinaga's skill and sense of duty—what would become the famous Genyosha. Returning to the front lines, Yorinaga killed Morgan Kell's brother, Patrick, leading to a final battle between Yorinaga and Morgan Kell on the desert world of Nusakan during the Fourth Succession War. Yorinaga ordered the already-engaged DCMS forces to stand aside or be fired upon, and then moved once more to engage Morgan Kell in single combat. The punishing effect of the desert world's high temperature rapidly drove both 'Mechs and their primitive cooling systems to the point of shutdown. At the battle's climax, Morgan once again made his *Archer* bow. Yorinaga attempted to return the honor, only for his 'Mech to lock up in the heat. Again perceiving himself defeated, on 24 October 3029 Yorinaga committed *seppuku* in the presence of Kuritan and Kell Hound notables.

WHM-6R WARHAMMER

POWER PLANT	VOX 280	MASS	70 TONS	CRUISING SPEED	43 KPH
COMM SYSTEM	O/P 3000 COMSET	CHASSIS	STARCORPS 100	MAXIMUM SPEED	64 KPH
T&T SYSTEM	LOREM IPSUM	ARMAMENT	2 DONAL PPCS	JUMP JETS	NONE
ARMOR	O/P 1500 ARB		2 MARTELL MEDIUM LASERS	JUMP CAPACITY	NONE
			2 MAGNA SMALL LASERS		
			1 HOLLY SHORT RANGE MISSILE 6 PACK		
			2 SPERRYBROWNING MACHINE GUNS		

Yorinaga's position as commander of one of the most well-equipped units in the Combine ensured him access to almost any 'Mech desired, and his senior rank would usually have indicated that he pilot a machine suited to command.

However, in this period, personal 'Mechs—machines owned not by the state but by a family, and passed down from generation to generation—were prominent, especially among the wealthy.

Yorinaga's *Warhammer* -6R rolled off the line in 2672 and faithfully served his branch of the Kurita family for centuries. Destroyed in battle no less than six times, Kuritan wealth and not a little luck ensured that it was always recovered and rebuilt. In the twenty-ninth century it was refit into what became the -6K standard, dropping the machine guns for additional heat sinks. After his defeat of Ian Davion, Yorinaga had the 'Mech converted back to a -6R.

There is evidence of extensive work performed on the targeting system following the strange incident on Mallory's World. After many diagnostics, a request was made by Yorinaga's chief technician to take the 'Mech out of the field for a lengthy period of time so as to replace the system entirely; a response in Yorinaga's handwriting can be seen that simply says, "You are missing the point." This was taken as a refusal, and the machine left as is. The family still operates the *Warhammer* to this day.





POSITION/RANK

BOUNTY HUNTER

AFFILIATION/UNIT

VARIOUS

BIRTH YEAR

VARIOUS

Perhaps no MechWarrior is both as well-known and as shrouded in mystery as the Bounty Hunter. The legend of this enigmatic predator began in the early thirtieth century, when stories of a deadly, ruthless mercenary first emerged. Never seen in the flesh, the Hunter repeatedly demonstrated an ability to bring to ground some of the most well-hidden and well-guarded targets around.

After decades of daring exploits all across the Inner Sphere and Periphery, it eventually became clear that the identity of the Bounty Hunter was passed down to a succession of individuals across the years. Rather than any sort of hereditary or feudal process, it is presumed that a successor was chosen from among the Bounty Hunter's close acquaintances—men and women with whom the Hunter served. By the time the Third Succession War limped to a close, the Hunter "franchise" had endured for a century.

The Bounty Hunter of this technologically degraded period was also among the most morally degraded of the Hunters. The Hunter's early exploits, though

always of a monetary bent, had managed to foster a sort of folk-hero view of the figure, someone who brought numerous war criminals and bandit lords to justice and accomplished what the Great Houses could not. In the late thirtieth century, this gave way to a wholly mercenary bent. The Bounty Hunter increasingly ignored the outlaws of the conventional wanted lists in favor of more unorthodox—and better paying—targets of all stripes, including civilians. It is certainly no coincidence that at this time the now-familiar credit symbols festooning the Hunter's 'Mech of choice became one of the mercenary's signature elements.

The list of daring missions fulfilled by this particular Hunter reads more as pulp fiction than anything within the realm of possibility for one man: the Markesan Affair, the coup on Azha, the assassination of Baron Thomas Finval, and the strange matter of the Amateur Mendicant Society. Indeed, in 3020 the infamous Lyran holoivid series *The Immortal Warrior* broadcast a thinly-veiled, "swiped from the headlines" take on one of the Bounty Hunter's most notorious successes: a hot drop on the combat command of the Third Oriente Hussars to kidnap its senior staff officer, who had left a nobleman's daughter standing at the altar two years prior. After the adaptation aired, with no mention made of the Bounty Hunter, *Immortal Warrior* star Ricardo Hunt received a message from the Hunter, noting that the operation was more difficult than the episode had portrayed, expressing disapproval that credit for the operation had been "misplaced," and musing on the state of Hunt's insurance policies. The episode was hurriedly reshot and re-released as a "director's cut" in which the Bounty Hunter appears as the Immortal Warrior's close friend and mastermind behind the attack.

Few survived their encounters with the Bounty Hunter. One who managed to do so was the equally infamous Natasha Kerensky, the Black Widow of Wolf's Dragoons. The two legends' first encounter, on Nova Roma in 3014, saw both MechWarriors tasked with hunting down Janos Marik's loyalists, only for the Hunter to lead Kerensky into a loyalist ambush and claim her *Marauder* as salvage. Kerensky swore vengeance, but the opportunity eluded her until 3024, when she was led into a trap laid by the Bounty Hunter on Le Blanc. The ambush failed, but the Hunter slew two of Kerensky's MechWarriors in the melee. Their final encounter took place three years later, on Benet III, when the two found themselves stranded together. Putting her anger aside, Kerensky worked with the Hunter to escape. Afterward, this incarnation of the Bounty Hunter vanished from history.

MAD-3R MARAUDER [MODIFIED]

POWER PLANT	VLAR 225	MASS	75 TONS	CRUISING SPEED	32 KPH
COMM SYSTEM	DALBAN MICRONICS	CHASSIS	GM MARAUDER	MAXIMUM SPEED	54 KPH
T&T SYSTEM	DALBAN HI-REZ	ARMAMENT	3 MAGNA HELLSTAR PPCS	JUMP JETS	CHILTON 600
ARMOR	VALIANT LAMELLOR		5 MAGNA MK II MEDIUM LASERS	JUMP CAPACITY	90 METERS

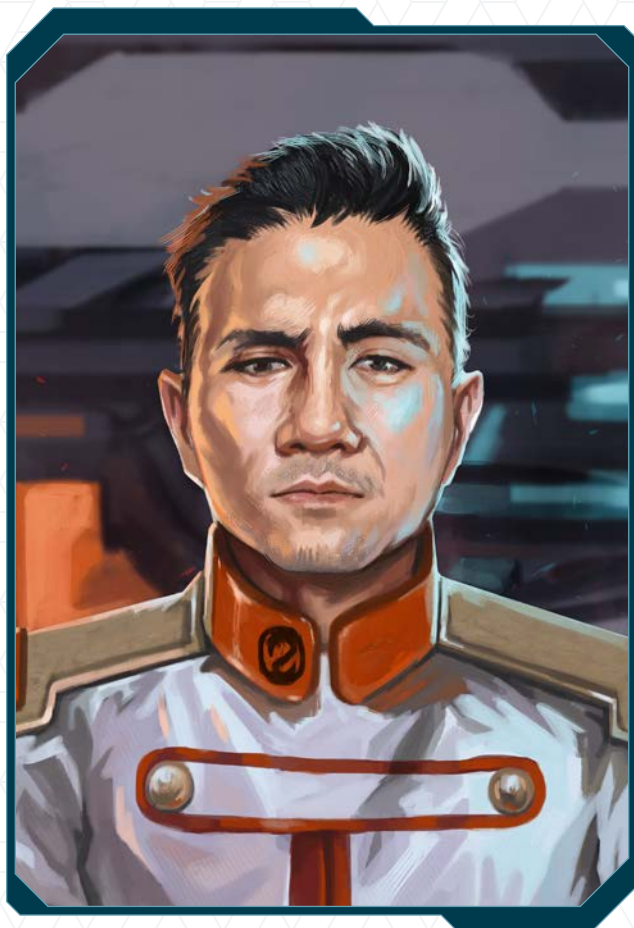
The initial 'Mechs of choice for the Bounty Hunter of the late Third Succession War alternated between a *Warhammer* and a *Griffin*, but from 3014 onward he exclusively piloted Natasha Kerensky's former *Marauder* -3R, thus beginning a long association of the Hunter with that BattleMech. The Dragoons, determined to conceal their origins as deep-cover scouts for the Clans, were not so foolish as to field their machines with Star League technology, and so the Hunter's prize was nothing more than a superbly maintained specimen of that breed.

Following a particularly trying Periphery mission—the hijacking of the TCS *Friesland*—the *Marauder*'s engine was damaged beyond repair. The Hunter replaced it with a smaller 225-rated reactor (jump jets being added to compensate for the loss of mobility), and switched out the 'Mech's autocannon for another Hellstar PPC. This third particle cannon, along with three additional Mk II lasers, relied heavily on the use of Star League-era double heat sinks recovered from a *lostech* cache during the *Friesland* mission. These improvements also allowed the 'Mech's armor to be increased by three tons.

The *Marauder* was upgraded again in 3044, when the Hunter somehow acquired a cutting-edge M-7 Gauss rifle and a 225 XL fusion engine. The Gauss rifle forced the removal of two lasers and three heat sinks, along with the dorsal Hellstar PPC, to make room for the bulky weapon and its sixteen slugs. ER PPCs replaced the remaining two particle cannons in the arms. He

claimed three solo kills in as many months with this upgraded machine in late 3050, though only at the cost of his comrades and the *Marauder*. In return, he captured a Smoke Jaguar *Timber Wolf* (*Mad Cat*), riding that into battle and into a new era of fame. Suddenly, the most hated MechWarrior in the Inner Sphere was a hero once more.





POSITION/RANK

COORDINATOR

AFFILIATION/UNIT

DRACONIS COMBINE

BIRTH YEAR

2997

The only child of Takashi and Jasmine Kurita, Theodore Kurita was groomed from a young age to be Coordinator of the Draconis Combine. From his stern father he learned the tenets of *bushido*, but from advisors like Subhash Indrahara, his father's deadly director of the Internal Security Force, he learned to temper that code with cold pragmatism and an attention to victory even at the cost of honor. This at-times *laissez-faire* approach to honor, combined with a notable rebellious streak and a father determined to raise his son in the same draconian fashion in which he had been raised, resulted in Theodore and Takashi being estranged for most of their lives.

Theodore attended the Sun Zhang Military Academy and Wisdom of the Dragon, graduating with high honors from both of those prestigious schools—first in his class at Wisdom of the Dragon. He had an undisputable flair for martial sciences, though the unconventional tactics he often advocated on the battlefield were considered close to heresy within the tradition-bound circles of the DCMS. Early in his military career, Theodore rotated rapidly through

a number of assignments, serving in no less than twelve different regiments. In every case, his combative spirit and unorthodox approach to warfare alienated his commanders, who could not simply shoot him the way they would any other officer of this sort. Fortunately, Takashi's desire to keep his son away from external threats until he produced an heir kept Theodore on the move.

In 3025, after a failing out between father and son, Theodore was at last tossed to the Legions of Vega—the nadir of the DCMS. It was with this band of misfits and rejects that Theodore at last found a home, maturing into an outstanding leader and general. When the Fourth Succession War broke out, it was his acumen that kept the Lyran front from collapsing while Takashi obsessed over the destruction of Wolf's Dragoons. Theodore's actions won him the Katana Cluster and the Order of the Dragon, and ultimately the posting of *Gunji-no-Kanrei*, Deputy for Military Affairs.

Though Takashi hoped to use the position to keep a tight leash on his son, Theodore turned the tables and used the rank to secure his grip on the DCMS and build it into a force able to stand up against an inevitable Steiner-Davion invasion. Sometime in 3030, he brokered a deal under which ComStar provided considerable military equipment to the DCMS in return for Theodore's support for the formation of the Free Rasalhague Republic. He then sought out the leaders of the yakuza and gained their support for the reforms he intended to impose on the DCMS. With these new allies, Theodore secretly built twelve new "Ghost Regiments," while overseeing the reequipping and reform of the rest of the Combine military. Innovations and machinations such as these allowed him to accomplish something Takashi never could: he outfoxed the Fox. Despite the DCMS being pressed to the limit, the surprises Theodore unleashed caused Hanse Davion to be bluffed into calling off the Suns' offensive during the War of 3039.

Having proven his ability, Theodore took charge of the Combine's defense a decade later against the Clans. Under his command, the DCMS won several of the Inner Sphere's few victories, at Wolcott and Luthien, and it was Theodore who negotiated the non-aggression pact with Hanse Davion that freed his border defenses to shift to the Clan front. Upon the death of his father in 3054, Theodore became Coordinator. He presided over 3057's Operation Bulldog, destroying the Smoke Jaguars and freeing many Combine worlds. This liberation earned him significant political capital, as did the satisfactory conclusion of the Combine-Dominion War in the early 3060s.

When the Jihad erupted, Theodore rose to the challenge once more. However, he suffered a massive stroke in January 3068. Falling into a coma, he never regained consciousness before his death on 5 January 3070.

ON1-K ORION

POWER PLANT	VLAR 300
COMM SYSTEM	IRIAN ORATOR-5K
T&T SYSTEM	WASAT AGGRESSOR TYPE 5
ARMOR	VALLIANT LAMELLOR

MASS	75 TONS
CHASSIS	K TYPE 5
ARMAMENT	1 KALIYAMA CLASS 10 AUTOCANNON
	1 KALIYAMA DEATH BLOOM MISSILE SYSTEM
	2 I.W.W. MEDIUM LASERS
	1 I.W.W. CLASS 4 S.R. MISSILE SYSTEM

REVENANT

CRUISING SPEED	43 KPH
MAXIMUM SPEED	64 KPH
JUMP JETS	NONE
JUMP CAPACITY	NONE



From the moment he first sat behind the controls of an *Orion* BattleMech, Aleksandr Kerensky at once formed a lifelong bond with his machine and eschewed any number of more modern designs in favor of that longtime Hegemony standard. It served Kerensky well for decades, through the liberation of Terra in 2779, where he used it kick in the gates of the Imperial Palace and bring an end to the Amaris Coup.

When Kerensky and the SLDF went into exile, the general was forced to abandon his aged and malfunctioning *Orion*, turning the 'Mech into a gutted shell left in the New Samarkand system. It was in that form that a Kuritan recovery team discovered it centuries later. After technicians restored the machine as best they could, this priceless gift was bestowed upon Theodore Kurita in 3018. The

Revenant, as he called it, served him well during the fierce fighting he saw in the Fourth Succession War. While Theodore treasured the 'Mech, he treasured victory all the more, and did not hesitate to sacrifice his 'Mech in pursuit of larger goals against the Lyrans on Marfik in 3028.

While the 'Mech was ultimately unsalvageable, its cockpit wound up in the BattleMech Museum on Solaris VII. In 3145, that world's Wolf Empire garrison was shocked by an unexpected *batchall* from the Scorpion Empire's Seeker Galaxy, bidding not for the rights to the planet but to the Museum.

Granting them Clan honors, elements of the Ninth Wolf Cavalry faced off against the Second Seeker Cluster on the outskirts of Solaris City, and the Scorpions emerged triumphant. Loading Kerensky's *Orion* cockpit into their cargo holds along with the rest of the museum's priceless treasures, they departed Wolf Empire space.



POSITION/RANK	CLASS VI SOLARIS CHAMPION, 3016-3022
AFFILIATION/UNIT	NONE
BIRTH YEAR	C. 2985

A legend amongst legends, to this day Gray Noton is recognized as perhaps the greatest Solaris Champion in history. It is striking, then, just how little we know of the man. In early interviews, Noton claimed that he served as a teenager in a mercenary outfit, before stowing away on a ship inbound from the Periphery to see what all the excitement was about on Solaris. He never named the unit, his role in it, or even his birthplace, though at different points he referred to both Lyran and Free Worlds heritage.

Whereas Noton might have been vague about his personal history, there was no doubt about his abilities. As a boy of 14, he indentured himself to the master of a lower arena, after impressing her with his adeptness in simulator combat. Killing a MechWarrior in only his second combat, inside a year Noton had defeated all comers in his weight class, and even a few above him. Scouts marked him as a natural, and offers flooded in.

By 3010, Noton was 25 years old and ready to move to the Solaris City circuit. Surprising everyone, he instead left Solaris altogether to put in a five-year stint with a mercenary company. Shrewdly aware of the opportunities to make a fast C-bill and keep his legend alive on Solaris, he had slick holovid clips of himself in action produced, which became hot sellers. Soon others attempted to cash in: two “documentaries” about Noton were staged and filmed in the Lyran Commonwealth—where he was embraced as a native son, just as he was in the Free Worlds League—without his knowledge.

Noton returned to Solaris VII in 3015, accompanied by a brand-new *Rifleman*. While some envied his luck in acquiring such a mint-condition specimen, none expected him to take to the Class VI circuit with it. New or not, any number of ‘Mechs in those arenas were more than capable of tearing Noton’s find to pieces.

Or so it was thought. Soon, however, Noton became a legend for his prowess in the machine. Already famed for his skill prior to his return, observers now frequently commented on how Noton and his *Rifleman* moved with the grace of a dancer, constantly confounding those who thought they had him square in their sights. By the following year, after a series of victories over Solaris’ best, fans christened Noton “Legend-Killer.” In response, Noton emblazoned his *Rifleman* with a cartoon ghost in the center of a circular sight, a symbol marking the Solaris Champion for the next seven years. Seemingly unstoppable, Noton shocked Solaris and the entire Inner Sphere when he voluntarily stepped down at the end of the 3022 season. Running a modest import/export business on Solaris in his retirement, eventually it was revealed that he used this work as a front for a much more lucrative career as an assassin, spy, and information broker.

On 5 May 3027, the body of Gray Noton was found in his office, his neck snapped. A safe was found lasered open and emptied out, its contents unknown. His killer was never brought to justice.

RFL-3N RIFLEMAN [MODIFIED?]

LEGEND-KILLER

POWER PLANT	PITBAN 240	MASS	60 TONS	CRUISING SPEED	43 KPH
COMM SYSTEM	GARRET T11-A	CHASSIS	KALLON TYPE IV	MAXIMUM SPEED	64 KPH
T&T SYSTEM	TRU-TRAK/SPAR 3C AMALGAM	ARMAMENT	2 MAGNA MK. III LARGE LASERS	JUMP JETS	NONE
ARMOR	KALLON ROYALSTAR		2 MAGNA MK. II MEDIUM LASERS	JUMP CAPACITY	NONE
			2 IMPERATOR-A AUTOCANNONS		

Star League technology? Or a disguised 'Mech of heavier weight? Considering Gray Noton's success against the biggest and best Solaris had to offer, all while leaving up to forty tons on the table, his -3N Rifleman, eventually known as *Legend-Killer* like its pilot, has had these explanations and many more thrown at it.

Some of the more popular explanations are untenable. While not one reporter or rival stable master ever managed to peek under the *Rifleman's* hood, Solaris' arenas are some of the most heavily scrutinized venues in the Inner Sphere, to prevent cheating and best broadcast the action. *Legend-Killer* was battered many times over the years, and analysis of armor shards and internal structure fragments left in the arena consistently revealed only conventional technologies. Similarly, a host of cameras and thermo-imaging scanners revealed no exceptional ranges, speeds, fire rates, or heat dissipation ability. Seismic sensors are usually ignored in the Class VI competitions, as there are no weight limits to police, so while the 'Mech's chassis may have been heavier than standard, there is no evidence that this was so.

An interview with Sara Heart-Rose published in an obscure Niops newsjournal may offer the answer. She claimed that a takedown of *Legend-Killer*—having “fallen off the back of a truck” and into her hands sometime in the 3060s, though the 'Mech's exact provenance could not be confirmed—revealed extensive customizations. The apparently stock neurohelmet concealed the internals of a SLDF model, a ruse preventing Noton's advantage from being picked up by broadcasting cockpit cams. Heart-Rose spoke of the 'Mech itself as a hangar queen of the highest order, a mess of patches and improvisations—primarily in the actuators and myomer bundling, though the nightmarish fusion of Tru-Trak and Spar 3c targeting computers was of particular note.

Unstable customizations are common amongst Solaris machines, as they never need to face the stress of long-term campaigns. The manufacturer stamps on these changes, however, pointed to an obscure Star League-era “skunkworks” facility, known to have created custom gear for Gunslinger duelists, SLDF special forces, and Martial Olympiad participants. Rather than the obvious double heat sinks, Ultra autocannons and the like proposed to this day, the secret of *Legend-Killer's* performance—over and above the phenomenal skills of Gray Noton himself—may lie in its subtler, typically overlooked structural components. With the apparent loss of Heart-Rose and *Legend-Killer* in a 3076 DropShip accident, we may never know for sure.



**POSITION/RANK**

STRATEGIC DIRECTOR; SUPREME LORD

AFFILIATION/UNITCAPELLAN CONFEDERATION;
TIKONOV FREE REPUBLIC**BIRTH YEAR**

2968

Born into the nobility on the Capellan world of Highspire, Pavel Ridzik was a vain and lustful man whose ambition resulted in a series of rises and downfalls that would put a holodrama to shame. Young, handsome, and with a brilliant shock of red hair, Ridzik cut a swath through the courts of the Capellan Confederation. His habit of bedding the wives of others resulted in him being drawn into numerous duels of honor, but as he won these with startling regularity, his enemies learned to bear the disgrace and looked to other ways to take their revenge. These figures appealed to the Chancellor, and as a result Ridzik was shunted off into obscurity.

As such, court wags were astounded when Ridzik was suddenly appointed commander of the Prefectorate Guard at the age of 21. As powerful as Ridzik's enemies were, the Chancellor's son Maximilian Liao was more so, and he used his influence to rescue Ridzik from oblivion. Maximilian was amused by the young noble's affrontery and also saw a ruthlessness that he could work with. Ridzik, excited by the promised rewards dangled in front of him, was

willing to bring Highspire and the Prefectorate Guard over to Maximilian. With such assistance, Maximilian launched a coup against his father, which went off without a snag. Tormax was placed in the hands of Ridzik for safekeeping, by now fast friends with the new Chancellor; the ex-Chancellor would die under mysterious circumstances two years later.

The following year Ridzik was gifted with command of a regiment, Stapleton's Iron Hand, a way of taking BattleMechs out of the hands of potential enemies and placing them in those of individuals who the Chancellor could rely on. Ridzik immediately departed for the Davion front, launching a two-year wave of skillfully led raids designed to keep the Suns forces in the area off-balance in the wake of the bloody Tikonov-Aosia campaign. In 2992 he was made Strategic Director of the entire Capellan Confederation Armed Forces, capping a startling rise to power.

The next twenty-five years saw Ridzik largely concerned with strategic matters, as he wrestled with the impoverished position in which the Confederation found itself during this era. However, he still took to the field at times. In 3008, he was part of an assault force launched against New Aragon; in 3011 he battled the Thirty-Third Avalon Hussars in defense of now-Duke Ridzik's own estates on Grand Base; and in 3025 he directed the Capellan assault on Stein's Folly. The Chancellor trusted him as much as he trusted anyone, and reserved Ridzik for some of his most onerous or challenging tasks. In one such instance, he was assigned to put down an undesirable religious movement on the world of Truth. Ridzik's force, masquerading as a rogue mercenary unit, slaughtered more than 3,000 worshippers there.

When the Fourth Succession War broke upon the Confederation, both Maximilian and Ridzik were manipulated by Justin Xiang, a Davion sleeper agent, with Ridzik thinking himself abandoned by an uncaring master in the midst of the Davion onslaught, and Maximilian coming to doubt Ridzik's loyalty to the Capellan cause. As a result, Maximilian dispatched an assassin to end Ridzik's life. This played into Hanse Davion's hands, however. Foiling the assassination attempt, Davion agents convinced Ridzik that he had no future in the Confederation and to turn traitor. The former Strategic Director was uplifted once more, being granted a new state of his own—the Tikonov Free Republic—and permitted the grandiose title of Supreme Leader.

However, Ridzik was given little opportunity to enjoy his new fiefdom. On 21 July 3029, Ridzik was assassinated by a Maskirovka agent operating under the orders of Romano Liao.

TDR-5S *THUNDERBOLT* [MODIFIED]

POWER PLANT	MAGNA 260	MASS	0 TONS	CRUISING SPEED	43 KPH
COMM SYSTEM	NEIL 8000	CHASSIS	LOREM IPSUM	MAXIMUM SPEED	64 KPH
T&T SYSTEM	RCA INSTATRAC MARK X	ARMAMENT	1 SUNGLOW TYPE 2 LARGE LASER	JUMP JETS	NONE
ARMOR	RYERSON 150		1 DELTA DART LONG RANGE MISSILE 15 RACK 3 DIVERSE OPTICS TYPE 18 MEDIUM LASERS 1 OMICRON 4000 MEDIUM LASER	JUMP CAPACITY	NONE

The Ridzik ancestral BattleMech served the family as far back as the early twenty-sixth century. Its first recorded action was on New Delos in 2524, where an assault by five regiments of the Tikonov Lancers was narrowly turned back. One bright spot in the campaign was the leadership provided by Baron Consumel Ridzik; he was noted as having seized the city of Wanderly, with his *Thunderbolt* leading the charge that broke the Helm Cuirassiers. While upgraded in the latter years of the Star League era, like the rest of the Inner Sphere the 'Mech's advanced technologies slowly eroded away over the centuries of the Succession Wars. Records indicate that it was destroyed at least eight times, but always rebuilt for the next round of combat, whether against Davion, Marik, or bandit forces.

By the time Pavel Ridzik took charge of the machine it had largely reverted to its original -5S configuration, though its new master had the SRM-2 removed and replaced with additional heat sinks. During a raid on Nopah in 2991, a young Iron Hand *Quickdraw* pilot threw his 'Mech in front of a massive volley of fire meant for Ridzik; the MechWarrior was killed, while Ridzik lost only his *Thunderbolt's* left arm. Rather than repairing the *Thunderbolt* properly, he had the *Quickdraw's* salvaged left arm grafted in its place in remembrance of the sacrifice, a display that cemented the loyalty of the Iron Hands to their young new commander.

When Ridzik was assassinated, his *Thunderbolt* passed to the new commander of the Iron Hand's successor unit, the Second Republican Guard. It survived until 3062 and the FedCom Civil War, where it was destroyed along with most of the Second on Algol.



THE CL INVA

HIDDEN DESTINY

NICHOLAS KERENSKY

AS7 - D - H ATLAS II [MODIFIED] | *UNITY*

KAI ALLARD-LIAO

CN9 - YLW2 CENTURION | *YEN - LO - WANG*

PHELAN KELL

WOLFHOUND IIC | *GRINNER*

VLAD WARD

TIMBER WOLF [PRIME] | *WARRANT*

ULRIC KERENSY

AIDAN PRYDE

MARTHE PRYDE

ADAM STEINER

AN SION ERA

GARGOYLE [PRIME] | GARMR

TIMBER WOLF [PRYDE] | DEATHTRAP

SUMMONER [PRIME] | THESEUS

AXM - 1N AXMAN | GAUNTLET

NICOLAI MALTHUS

ANASTASIUS FOCHT

SHIN YODAMA

SUMMONER [M]

AS7 - K ATLAS | HEIMDALL

PHX - 3M PHOENIX HAWK [MODIFIED] | KUROI KIRI



HIDDEN DESTINY

RANDALL N. BILLS

RED STONE CITY DROPPORT

BONE-NORMAN

TRELLSHIRE, LYRAN COMMONWEALTH

14 JUNE 3046

The sun crested the craggy badlands in the distance, its friendly yellow light bursting from rocky chains and cascading down twisted slopes in a bright flood of rejoicing that the night had been banished once more.

Precentor Vincent Dupont stood tall in his white uniform, ignoring his small potbelly that he never quite managed to vanquish. He breathed in the fresh but alien scents with a chest-expanding effort—the wafts from the deep deserts already bringing rising heat and grit—and then let it out explosively, chuckling.

Reading too much ancient literature again? He could almost hear his Chandra's voice chiding, despite the more than four hundred and fifty light years that separated him from their home on Terra.

I've traveled to over a hundred star systems, and yet that Terran-like light... Visions of pale blue eyes twinkling as she worked her garden sparked. Beauty within beauty.

A *thump* undulated through the ground, nearly vibrating his teeth, as the 75-ton *Black Knight* trod heavily across the DropPort tarmac and began walking up the ramp of the towering ball of metal that was a *Union*-class DropShip. The thirteen-point-five-meter-tall 'Mech strode inside the cargo door as though it was a human stepping inside a large, mobile building.

Statistics of the DropShip surged forward: *Introduced in 2708. Eighty-one-point-five meters in diameter and standing seventy-eight meters tall. Massing 3,600 tons, Fuel...burn-days...safe thrust.* The numbers ran as a subroutine in the back of his mind; the result of a lifetime of study and dedication. After all, the *Knox* was one of *his* ships. In fact, he should already be at

the nadir jump point of the Bone-Norman system, as all three vessels of this Explorer Corps expedition were under his command. Especially as the *Golden Hind*, a *Buccaneer*-class DropShip, had already lifted off and begun its multi-day burn toward their JumpShip several hours ago. But he always preferred to be the last man off soil of a launching point for any expedition.

"The peace of Blake be with you," a soft voice interrupted.

Vincent clenched his teeth, absently running fingers through his still thick, shoulder-length white hair as he turned. He took a moment to calm his nerves as he looked past the interloper to the herculean rock jutting out of the ground beyond the tarmac, with Red Stone City desperately clinging to its side as though the outcropping would protect it from the ravages of the harsh deserts beyond, or the predations of pirates from the Periphery.

After all, the Bone-Norman system sat at the edge of the Inner Sphere, the border at which the powers of the Archon of the Lyrans Commonwealth could still claim fealty and offer protection. Mostly. Beyond lay chaos, danger, and death. What's more, despite his crew including some of the finest ComStar technicians available and triple the standard repair parts, they'd be traveling through dozens of uninhabited systems for what could be years. If their Kearny-Fuchida hyperspace drive failed, they'd be stranded forever, facing starvation and eventual death.

And yet, it's where we're going?! To find...what's out there! That excitement ameliorated harsher thoughts as his eyes found hers; such blackness within the diminutive woman standing in front of him in a similar, crisp, white uniform.

"Precentor Bradford," he said, his tone as it should be. Calm, respectful.

"Are you ready to find Primus Sims' visions of our destruction?" she asked.

Vincent had ignored the talk of visions from a delusional Primus that had plagued ComStar for nearly a century. The pseudo-religious overtones of ComStar went hand in hand with such superstition, of course, but still... *we are scientists!* She seemed almost amused by his silence. *Though how could you read anything in such a cold face?*

"I'm surprised you didn't leave on the *Hind*," she continued, inflection still as flat as the planed tarmac.

Her dirty-brown, short-cropped hair waved in the growing strength of the wind, while her small mouth and dark, beady eyes remained thin and stretched. *I bet she's never smiled.* Pale blues sparkled. *Or seen beauty.*

"This is the first time we've directly served together, commander," he finally said. "But I'm always the last man of my command off soil."

She canted her head, as though inspecting something strange and unusual, though her cold, freckled face revealed nothing. "The Blessed Blake embraced liturgy for ComStar. I am pleased to see you embrace that further in every aspect of your life."

He couldn't respond for a moment, taken aback at her misreading of the situation, much less the lecturing tone. *Just tradition, lass. Just tradition.* But though he nearly said that out loud, he managed to keep his usual grouching behind sealed lips. *You've never been pleased at anything in your life.*

He'd never met one of her kind that had.

"After you, Precentor," he finally said, sweeping his hands towards the waiting DropShip. She inclined her head slightly, as though taking her due, and walked past with steady strides. There were no markings on her uniform that set her apart from himself in any way, beyond the fact that while he commanded the ships, she held mission command authority.

But he knew the look. The smooth, danger-filled walk. The head always moving, to catch every angle. And that fanaticism, buried—almost—behind calculating, black eyes. Decades in the service, and he knew the look of a ROM agent by now. The internal and external security force of his Order that had made entire Great Houses dance to their tune.

And I'm heading out into the unknown, with one perched on my shoulders. Blake's Blood, Chandra, what have I gotten myself into?

He finally followed, last man off soil, as always.

X235-A2

UNKNOWN SYSTEM

DEEP PERIPHERY

30 NOVEMBER 3046

Precentor Arabella Bradford watched the holovid tank at the center of the *Merchant*-class JumpShip command

bridge. Despite the recent emergence back into real-time from the 27.9 light-year space-folding jump, the blinking lights across consoles demanding procedural attention were ignored.

Instead, the bridge's entire crew—both the circle of technicians spread around her horizontally, and those inverted above her head at mirrored stations—gaped at the holodisplay spinning in all its glory in their midst.

"Blake's Blood," Precentor Dupont breathed into the silence of the deck bridge. "That would explain why the calculations took so long to finalize for our jump."

She wasn't a scientist, though such things were intriguing. But even she couldn't tear her gaze away to see if the reverence in the man's voice was for the use of that sacred name, or what hung in the air in front of them. He wasn't a bad commander. The recent months let her know he was extremely capable. But he lacked appropriate...decorum. Dedication. *I'll speak with him again later.*

In the meantime, they all feasted on the visual before them.

A miniscule sense of blackness surrounded by an accretion disk of intensely bright light, spiraling at different speeds, filled the holovid. The twin stars of this system trailed long tails of light that spun off their coronas, spiraling into that disc. Despite the fact that this was only a holographic representation of what existed over a dozen AU below their position in real-space, it was bright enough to hurt the eyes, causing them to squint. Almost as though even the display couldn't craft a visualization of reality that wouldn't damage human vision.

The computer spat out spatial coordinates, distances, masses, and velocities. She took them in, but could barely keep up with the details. She cocked her head. *Fascinating.*

"Sir, were the calculations correct?" the ship's XO asked.

Arabella frowned as she looked at the woman. *A shaking voice is unbecoming for someone in command.*

"Jaxon," Precentor Dupont said. "Jaxon," he said again, voice filled with Command.

The overweight man shook his head before responding. "Sorry, sir." She watched him impassively as his fingers flew across the keyboard. "Yeah. No gravity stresses outside of parameters. Our distance is safe. But probably two weeks to recharge, if we're lucky."

She narrowed her eyes as the man's eyes stole back to the holovid. It was like nothing they'd ever seen before, true. But duty was duty. *Another one to watch.*

"Hot damn!" Precentor Dupont yelled, slapping his hand on the command chair that floated in the microgravity. The sounds echoing and bouncing and mingling with humming monitors and exhaled breathes from a dozen bodies.

Will I ever become used to such exuberance? But the tension eased from the bridge in postures loosed,

vanishing frowns, and unclenched fists. *Not many men could do that with two words. He could be of much use...*

"Now that's a sight I'd never thought I'd see," Vincent continued, excitement liming every word. "A micro black hole. Well, no planetary run here, people. But we've got two weeks to suck up every bit of data we can on this astronomical event. That's why we're here!"

UNNAMED CARGO STATION

KINBRACE

DEEP PERIPHERY

9 APRIL 3047

Vincent fumed as the ROM agent continued the negotiations.

"We're grateful for any information you have concerning other denizens of the Deep Periphery," Precentor Bradford said. She faced partially away from Vincent—her shoulder-length hair veiling her face—across the table from this strange woman wearing bright, unusual looking clothing, and bearing a sigil on her breast (uniform?) of an old, tall-ship silhouette against a red/orange sea and setting sun. He didn't recognize it at all.

"ComStar is well aware of the Hanseatic League," Arabella continued, "and the powerful mercantile empire your ruling council has carved out of these barren stars. You are to be commended."

Some of ComStar knew about this league. He stretched his neck, feeling the tension all the way to his toes, looking away from the rather ramshackle table, fingers unconsciously scratching several days' growth on his chin. Finding a more ramshackle room half-filled with traders from a dozen worlds; in a ramshackle building that was an overgrown shed-become-inn-become-trading-house; in the middle of a large, hard-beaten gravel flat region perhaps a kilometer on its side that operated as a central cargo station and clearing house for trading between various systems in this sector of the Deep Periphery. Just enough room to allow two DropShips at a time. They'd been warned off trying to bring more than one. To keep the peace, they said. *Ha!*

"And we be most aware of the Adepts of the ComStar," the local replied, head inclining as though in respect.

Despite the thick accent and odd phrasing, they readily understood one another. *Because we've been dealing with them?! A thirty-world empire half a thousand light-years out where there should be nothing but hardscrabble serfs and degenerate tyrants lording over a few broken down BattleMechs, and he'd been told nothing of it!*

What am I the commander of, if they keep this from me? He'd always struggled with the pervasive secrecy of ComStar, generally finding it got in the way of progress. But he put up with it because they let him explore the stars. But *this?* This was crazy. *It's our mission to find what's out here. And come to find out, other teams already knew whole swaths of this Coreward sector of the Deep Periphery!* He ignored pale blue *tsking* eyes as he ground his teeth in frustration.

The other woman delicately set a computer storage cube upon the table. "This be our current understanding of systems," she continued, pulling his attention back to the table; her grey eyes were flat and determined. "For nearly one hundred light years from this point."

Vincent's eyebrows nearly climbed up to his graying hairline. If that were true—if it would be invaluable knowledge to add to their database. *Provided we don't already have it.* He closed his eyes, noting the bitterness. He refused to accept that in his command. *Including myself.* If true, it would mean they could turn in a whole new direction, however. He opened his eyes. *Perhaps where previous crews have not already explored.*

"I have access to considerable funds. A gift can be arranged for your august ruling council," Precentor Bradford responded, the cool confidence in her voice easily the match of this expert trader.

The woman raised a hand and waggled her fingers in a strange pattern. "We care not for your ComStar weights. It be no value here amongst our systems."

"We have long-term trade agreements with other Periphery entities, we could —"

The woman waggled her fingers once more. "Ours be better."

Precentor Bradford slowly canted her head.

Those were never going to work and you knew it. You placed them first to let her believe she had the better bargaining power. What are you going to give her that she cannot resist?

"I have a Star League-era *Sentinel* BattleMech. It will be yours," she said softly.

For the first time in the hours-long meeting, Vincent watched emotion flicker in the woman's eyes. *And the hook is set. She's good. But Arabella's better.*

It took him a moment to realize he'd thought of her by her first name.



Ten minutes later, they strode across the gravel towards the *Knox*, ignoring the curious stares from the gaggle of people surging through the trading area. Precentor Bradford cradled the cube in the crook of her arm. *All ramshackle.*

"I assume you want me to switch out the *Sentinel's* advanced weaponry for lower-tech substitutes?" he said. "I got a good look at their 'Mech guard. They won't know the difference. Their *lostech* is not as bad as some, but bad."

"Already done."

Ha! Just like the trick Primus Mori pulled against the entire Draconis Combine before the War of 3039. I guess if works well, keep using it. He vacillated between respect that she'd come into this negotiation so well prepared, and anger that she'd given orders to his crewman without informing him. *How could she sound as though she's spent her usual ten minutes lecturing on geopolitics and subterfuge in just two words!*

Another, more disturbing thought blossomed. *Do I need to start doubting my own crew?*

"You could've told me about the Hanseatic League," he continued, pushing away such thoughts. "Have we traveled anywhere we didn't know already?"

"We've tagged numerous systems not in any ComStar databank, Precentor," she responded. "Our mission is still very much a success. And will continue to be one."

He gritted his teeth, trying to keep his voice level. Realizing in all the long months of their voyage so far, he'd never once heard a deviance in her pitch. *Stupid, inhuman ROM.*

"And why wasn't I told?" he asked one last time as they neared the ramp of their DropShip and he swung his fist in the air to let the crew known to start preparations for lift-off.

She gave him one of her extra inscrutable looks and marched onto the ramp first, as he waited to be the last off soil. *Right. Need to know. Always...need...to...know.*

X558-B3

UNKNOWN SYSTEM

DEEP PERIPHERY

27 OCTOBER 3047

"Death unto you. You are denied my domain!"

The words were screamed at Arabella above the sounds of weapons fire as the nearly frothing little man fell back, his guards trying to protect the dictator. She calmly backed away, ignoring the wet, cold mist settling everywhere, a pistol she kept secreted away now in hand as the negotiations collapsed into anarchy.

Something large moved in the heavy jungle that covered whole swaths of this planet, before a huge tree shuddered and fell, revealing a lumbering BattleMech. It was covered in moss and vines, gaping holes where armor plating had long ago been torn away, and one of the arms hung limp, myomer muscle showing through more holes.

Arabella was an expert in a wide field of studies, including every known BattleMech design ever fielded. And the horrible, dilapidated state of the beast caused long seconds to pass, in which time it raised its right arm and directed a particle projector blast against their DropShip three hundred meters behind them. The azure beam lashed out, leaving after-images momentarily burned onto retinas, but swept wide of the mark.

Small-arms weapons fire continued between the crewmen she'd adopted as guards, and the disheveled members of the tyrant's "court." She snorted at the ridiculousness. Another world they'd found—not even here long enough to discover what they called this system—populated by a few thousand souls, lorded over by a trumped-up king with access to a single, ancient BattleMech that gave him unassailable power.

Gladiator. As the smell of ozone wafted through the clearing and the bright flash of pistol laser fire lit the

heavy undergrowth around their position, she finally dug up the reference. One of the very first BattleMechs ever built. Five hundred years ago. *How long have these people been out here?*

"Precentor Bradford," Precentor Dupont's voice spoke in her ear-comm. "Um...do you wish us to return fire? I'm fearful of civilian casualties."

She was far enough away the odds of small-arms fire striking here were now minimal. And if that 'Mech managed to actually hit their position, she'd resign her commission. Still, if there were real trouble, the man should be willing to make sacrifices. *They may be scientists, but they are still ComStar. I will need to increase my efforts to strengthen his...dedication.*

A large explosion behind caused her guards to jump, but she looked over her shoulder without breaking stride. The *Gladiator* had attempted to fire its PPC once more, but obviously the capacitors had finally failed after such terrible decades (centuries?) of maintenance, and the entire gun and most of the arm had blown off, the 'Mech listing and already falling to slam through the heavy trees toward the verdant ground.

"As you can see, Precentor, there is no need. We should prepare for liftoff." She could see her "guards" eye her with incredulity that she'd never ducked nor broken stride. She eased her pistol back into its hidden holster. *I'll need to continue my work with them as well.*

X936-E7

UNKNOWN SYSTEM

DEEP PERIPHERY

1 MAY 3048

"—The Primus promulgated the Blessed Blake's mandate of retaining balance within the Inner Sphere and attempting to keep high technologies from the hands of the Great Houses that would only use it for more death and war. The audacity of the Dragon, combined with the Primus' foresight in gifting Theodore Kurita BattleMechs, kept the Federated Commonwealth from crushing House Kurita during the War of 3039."

After close to two years of Arabella's droning instructions—as though endless lecturing would increase his crew's dedication; although it had for some, who now followed her around like sheep—he'd learned the trick of seeming attentive while completely ignoring her words.

Vincent watched the holodisplay, absently scratching his full beard. The stupid thing was annoying, but somehow he'd found himself trapped in a self-imposed contest. *If she's going to grow her stupid hair into a giant braid, I'll match her. At least in this.* He tried ignoring that last thought. It grew harder and harder.

"But mark my words," she droned, "there will need to be future re-balancing. House Davion and Steiner simply grow too powerful, and must be kept in check."

He nodded absently, grunting as though in agreement. He'd tried having a conversation once, bringing up

that reading between the lines of the Order's records seemed to imply it was Toyama, Blake's successor, that had radicalized ComStar and forged them on a path of "keeping the Inner Sphere in line." But before he'd finished his first sentence, the dark gleam in her eye let him know he'd walked too close to a line that could be very dangerous for any ComStar personnel. He'd paid for that for months as he'd eased her most of the way off his back. But he knew she'd never forget or forgive his apparent lapse of faith.

"Precentor." A voice broke across the comm, blessedly silencing Arabella. "We're approaching the commander's bunk." Vincent stared avidly at the display—a video feed of a camera mounted on the lead marine commanding the expedition on the derelict JumpShip they'd discovered upon entering this system.

"Proceed, Adept Vess," Vincent responded. As they approached, he could just see the outline, long-faded, on the hatch, of a star system, with nine planets. A long whistle, from Jaxon, echoed on the bridge. "Terran Hegemony. My head. Half a thousand years old. I had no idea they'd sent any explorations out this far."

"Precentor," Technician Jula broke in on another line. "We believe the KF drive blew a helium seal, which is likely what stranded them."

"Confirmed, Adept," he responded.

They watched as the door opened to the commander's billet, and they found what they expected after so many others. A desiccated, frozen human body, with a hole drilled through the forehead. The crew had killed themselves in place of starving, as there was no planet in this system that could support any type of life.

He shuddered. This exploration—despite the haranguing of Arabella—had been the highlight of his career. But he couldn't help thinking of a familiar pair of pale blue eyes. *I hope this isn't my end. I have to get back to my Chandra...*

X104-C6

UNNAMED SYSTEM

DEEP PERIPHERY

27 SEPTEMBER 3048

"Blake's Blood!" Precentor Dupont said, voice almost lost in the proximity alert klaxon's blaring the length of the JumpShip.

Bile rose in the back of his throat, and the fear on the bridge slicked his skin. Less than half an hour since they'd arrived into this unnamed system, and a wing of aerospace fighters were streaking toward them. In their two years of explorations, they'd only once before run into an aerospace fighter, a craft venting air and fuel as it barely clawed its way into the upper atmosphere in a vain attempt to stop their insertion trajectory. But *ten* fighters, already at the jump point?

He tapped the console again, bringing up a close-up of one of the fighters. Gleaming, with strange, unknown

markings. More crazy—the computer tried to tag the design, and kept flipping between a *Stingray* and *Spad*. But the strange craft wasn't either.

"Precentor," a trembling voice broke his concentration. He glanced at Jaxon. "We've got a JumpShip our sensors didn't initially pick up."

"What?! Show me."

The deep-range scan brought up a fair display, despite the distance involved. As he watched, a DropShip slowly disengaged, and begin a high-speed burn toward them.

The two flights of aerospace fighters unleashed a fusillade of laser fire in a tight formation that flashed mere meters in front of the bridge of the JumpShip, then they flashed past. He watched them effortlessly flip end-over and begin a burn to slow down and begin another pass.

"You have to deploy our fighters," Arabella said, voice cold and utterly controlled, as it always was.

"Are you insane?" he said. He closed his eyes momentarily, knowing he'd pay for that.

"What?" Somehow her face seemed even colder.

Vincent stabbed his fingers at the holodisplay as the computer also failed to tag the JumpShip. "Those are fighters we cannot designate. And that's a JumpShip we do *not* know."

For once, she didn't seem to catch his meaning. The bile rose further, and the full import of the moment crashed around him, the klaxon still bellowing its warning of danger into their ears. "We are the guardian of Star League technology. And yet even we have lost so many advances as the centuries of warfare have ground the universe down. But here, *thirteen hundred light-years* from the edge of the Inner Sphere, we suddenly find a star vessel that appears brand new, that we've never seen before?!"

She slowly cocked her head. *She got it.* He glanced back at those strange markings, and the evidence of high technology where there should be none. A superstitious premonition danced across his skin until the hair on his arms was standing upright. *Could it be?* He shook his head at such silliness, cleared his throat to keep it firm.

"All hands. Prepare to be boarded."

UNNAMED DROPSHIP

DEEP PERIPHERY

29 SEPTEMBER 3048

Blood streamed out of Arabella's mouth, down her chin and splattered across her naked breasts and stomach as she swam back up out of haze of interrogation drugs and spit out a tooth. The copper tang reminded her of training from years ago, while the lacerations and bruises across her skin screamed for attention. She ignored it all, standing up straighter to alleviate aching muscles, holding tight to the strips of nylon that bound her arms above her head in the small cell.

"Is that all you can summon?" She was trying to get them to talk. To dig out their secrets. She remembered voices in the depths of the drugs, but nothing since. A vibration through her feet let her know they were under thrust. *On a DropShip, then? Likely heading to the planet with their captives?*

The monster in front of her nodded, as though in respect. He (it?) was the only person she'd seen since the shocking boarding, with giant armored infantry tearing their way through the hatch. She'd spent a lifetime mastering any fear, and dedicating herself to the cause of ComStar power. But as those mechanical beasts entered the bridge, the first wash of fear in long years weakened her resolve. And now this...creature. Certainly man-shaped, but...*easily 2.3 meters and probably 175 kg. You could make four of me out of it. Is it even human?*

Another woman entered, shaven head, single-suit, only that strange dagger-star insignia on the collar. The beast nodded to the newcomer, obviously ready to use Arabella's body as a punching bag again if directed.

"The Khan wishes to know how you resisted the drugs so well." The eyes and tone demanded instant obedience. The high technology evident in the ship; the strange ranks and images—the leaping cat she saw on bulkheads as she managed to sneak looks from behind her blindfold; it all spoke of power.

Immense power.

What have we discovered? Visions come to life?

Won't talk. Not yet. Power only respects power. But then...we'll see.

The woman cocked her head, almost as a mirror of Arabella's own mannerism. "No. I can see you are not broken yet." That same respectful nod, as though it was worthy to stand up to such pain.

My ROM masters never respected me for my strength. They only demanded it.

Arabella gritted her teeth as the shadow of the beast fell across her once more.

UNNAMED DROPSHIP

DEEP PERIPHERY

30 SEPTEMBER 3048

It shouldn't take this long. Is the numbness spreading faster? Please work faster.

Vincent floated. In horror, he remembered endless truths and secrets of ComStar and the Great Houses spilling from his lips. He'd talked for hours after they had beaten and then drugged him. He could still smell the vomit caked in his beard as he floated further away.

I'm sorry, my Chandra. I betrayed my oaths. Others think I take them lightly. But you know, my Chandra. You know. I've held out some of the most important details. But they'll have it from me. I have to have something to hold onto. Something that remains mine.

His hands started to buck against the cords he'd tied with sheets as the weight of the DropShip bunk on his neck continued to press down, and primal survival instincts demanded flight or fight. But this one last thing he could accomplish. He was sure Arabella would already have killed herself. This one last thing he could match her in.

Pale blue eyes greeted him in the oncoming blackness...

SMOKE JAGUAR COMMAND

MOUNT SZABO, JAGUAR PRIME

HUNTRESS, KERENSKY CLUSTER

3 OCTOBER 3048

Khan Leo Showers finished watching the interrogation recordings as his saKhan stood beside him. "This is all of it? There have been no more deaths?" he said, deep voice filling the office.

The annoyance on saKhan Weaver's face spoke of a Trial of Grievance for allowing such an invaluable resource to be wasted. "None. And I believe there may even be some good candidates for bondsmen. One in particular is surprisingly...pliant, yet resilient and dedicated. Perhaps the heart of a Smoke Jaguar is there."

He nodded, leaving such things to her capable hands. "And your thoughts?"

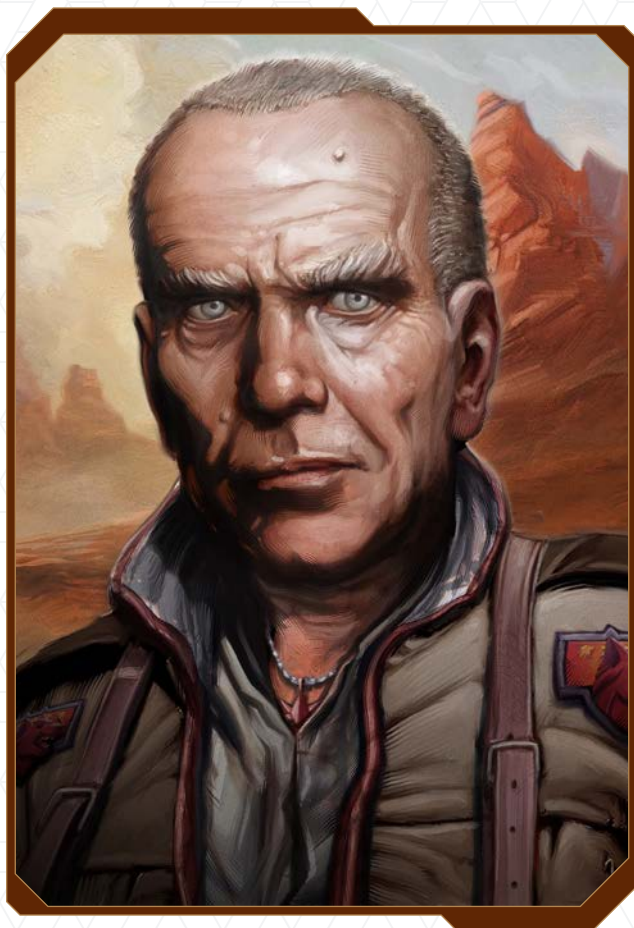
"This is...unexpected," she said after a long pause staring at the blank screen.

The understatement of the century. He heaved out of the chair, mane of black hair rustling with the speed, and then stood in the center of his small office buried in the depths of Mt. Szabo.

"This...it is more precious than the finest *giftake* any warrior has seized from a battlefield," he said, light-green eyes burning as he looked beyond his saKhan to new vistas he could now see. "This ComStar vessel. This *Outbound Light*...our best understanding of the Inner Sphere since the traitorous Dragoons fell silent. It will shift the balance of power. We have here the means of defeating the *stravag* Wardens in the Grand Council, and finally marching to war. The Great Father left a collapsed Star League and entrusted us with the Hidden Hope. Which will become *our* destiny.

"The Clans shall return to the Inner Sphere, and with our feet on their necks, raise the flag of the Star League once more!"





POSITION/RANK	COLONEL (STAR LEAGUE-IN-EXILE); ILKHAN
AFFILIATION/UNIT	STAR LEAGUE-IN-EXILE; CLAN WOLF
BIRTH YEAR	2764

Eldest son of Star League Commanding General Aleksandr Kerensky, Nicholas, his brother Andery, and their mother Katyusha lived under assumed names for their protection. Raised in Amaris-occupied Moscow, Nicholas joined his mother's resistance cell as a youth, but keenly felt the absence of his father during those hard years.

Having grown up on the legends of Aleksandr, Savior of the Star League, Nicholas was devastated when his father accepted the Council Lords' revocation of his duties as Protector without putting up a fight, and his disillusionment grew when Aleksandr conceived of Operation Exodus—in Nicholas' view, once again fleeing rather than confronting a challenge head-on. Nicholas took his destiny into his own hands, manipulating others to ensure that events unfolded to his advantage. Fearing uprisings would break out during the long journey down the Exodus Road, he inserted an agent among disgruntled officers and organized the *Prinz Eugen* mutiny, using his inside information to intercept, capture, and publicly

execute the mutineers, forestalling further unrest through this show of force.

Nicholas was already cold and calculating, but these tendencies became more pronounced after a near-fatal bout with the Curse of Eden brain fever in 2790. He survived with his confidence and drive intact, and took command of the 146th Royal BattleMech Division. Upon Aleksandr's death in 2801 amid spiraling factional violence on the Pentagon Worlds, Nicholas proved himself his father's son—not by taking command of the SLDF, but by gathering scientists, loyal soldiers, and much of the navy and making a Second Exodus to Strana Mechty.

While the Pentagon Wars raged, Nicholas meditated on his next steps, and is said to have fasted in isolation for days in a circle drawn on the ground before being rewarded by a vision of how he would reshape his people into what became known as the Clans. Naming most for dominant predatory species with traits he admired, he honed his twenty battle groups into an elite fighting force, then launched Operation Klondike to reclaim the Pentagon worlds.

While modern Crusaders based their concept of the ilClan being supreme above all others by dint of capturing Terra, citing an obscure passage in Nicholas' journals, his contemporaries' accounts suggest that Nicholas had a different intention. Obsessed with Unity, he saw new beginnings of factionalization and discontent among his Clans once the warlords of the Pentagon had been defeated, and realized he would need a new foe against which his warriors could pit their strength. Circumstances brought his focus onto Sarah McEvedy's Wolverines, and he created the new concepts of Absorption and Annihilation to remove their challenge to his authority. His endorsement soon thereafter of Clan Wolf's bid to Absorb the Widowmakers has led some to suggest he hoped to achieve literal Unity by pushing the Clans into a series of Absorption Trials, eliminating the weakest, with the end goal being a single Clan, the ilClan, ruling by right of martial supremacy. At that stage, having achieved Unity, an external target would still be needed to keep the warriors of the ilClan focused and dutiful: Terra.

We shall never know for sure what Nicholas intended. His death while refereeing a Trial between Clan Wolf and Clan Widowmaker in 2834 left his life's work incomplete and his grand vision for reshaping society ill-defined and imperfectly executed. Yet his words and deeds inspired his people to carry out what they believed to be his intent, acting in his name and venerating him with religious fervor. For their Great Founder, his people returned from across the stars to reclaim their ancestral homes.

AS7-D-H *ATLAS II* [MODIFIED]

UNITY

POWER PLANT	VLAR 300	MASS	100 TONS	CRUISING SPEED	32 KPH
COMM SYSTEM	ARMY COMM CLASS 5 WITH ECM SUITE	CHASSIS	FOUNDATION TYPE 10X	MAXIMUM SPEED	54 KPH
T&T SYSTEM	ARMY CORPORATION TYPE 29K WITH ACTIVE PROBE AND ARTEMIS IV FCS	ARMAMENT	1 TYPE KOV LB-10X AUTOCANNON	JUMP JETS	NONE
ARMOR	COMPOSITE A-4 FERRO-FIBROUS		1 TYPE XX "GREAT BOW" LRM-20 LAUNCHER	JUMP CAPACITY	NONE
			2 KOLIBRI DELTA SERIES MEDIUM PULSE LASERS		
			1 PATTERN J7 SRM-6 LAUNCHER		
			2 SERIES 6W EXTENDED-RANGE LARGE LASERS		

When Aleksandr Kerensky ordered the creation of the original *Atlas*, he called for it to be as fearsome as possible, to strike fear into any who might contemplate opposing the Star League. For the elite Royal units of the SLDF, Kerensky commissioned the advanced *Atlas II*, which was just beginning to see deployment when the Periphery Revolt broke out. Nearly all AS7-D-H's that survived the Star League Civil War departed on the Exodus with General Kerensky, and many ended up in Clan-held Brian Caches.

At the head of the 146th Division, Nicholas demonstrated his abilities as a warrior in combat against both separatist militias and rogue SLDF-in-exile units, taking the field to protect the supplies, personnel and transports he required for his Second Exodus. During the evacuation of Vesta on Eden, Nicholas held the line against a bandit force calling itself the Irkutsk Irregulars, firing until his missile launchers and autocannon ammo ran dry and leaving a half dozen 'Mechs and tanks in flames at his feet. With only pulse lasers remaining, Nicholas charged the Irregulars' commander and used his armored battle fists to pound the bandit *Pillager* to scrap.

On Ironhold in 2834, Nicholas breached a Circle of Equals during a Trial of Refusal between Clans Wolf and Widowmaker, responding to the desperate Widowmakers' violation of one-on-one *zellbrigen* dueling protocols during the battle between Wolf Khan Jerome Winson and his Widowmaker counterpart, Cal Jorgensson. As Kerensky approached, the panicked Widowmaker fired blindly and pierced the iIKhan's cockpit, killing him instantly and dooming the Widowmakers to Absorption.

Despite numerous Trials of Possession by Goliath Scorpion Seekers desperate to add it to their Temple of the Nine Muses, Nicholas' *Atlas II* remains in a place of honor in the museum annex to the Great Hall of the Clans, watched over by the Ebon Keshik.



NICHOLAS KERENSKY



POSITION/RANK LEFTENANT (ARMED FORCES OF THE FEDERATED COMMONWEALTH); DUKE OF ST. IVES; SOLARIS VII GRAND TOURNAMENT CHAMPION, 3054-3056; JIANG-JUN (CAPELLAN CONFEDERATION ARMED FORCES); LORD GOVERNOR (REPUBLIC OF THE SPHERE)

AFFILIATION/UNIT ST. IVES COMPACT; FEDERATED COMMONWEALTH; CENOTAPH STABLES; CAPELLAN CONFEDERATION; REPUBLIC OF THE SPHERE

BIRTH YEAR 3030

The eldest son of Solaris Champion Justin Allard and St. Ives Compact Duchess Candace Liao, Kai's natural talent gained early recognition at the New Avalon Military Academy, where he became the first cadet in the institution's history to beat the infamous "no-win" La Mancha scenario. Serving with the Tenth Lyran Guards after graduation, he helped childhood friend Victor Steiner-Davion develop a plan to beat Clan Jade Falcon on Twycross. When Victor's flank was threatened by Clan forces coming through the Great Gash, Kai faced them alone in a *Hatchetman*, stalling their advance until he could detonate his reactor, triggering pre-planted explosives that buried the Falcon Guards under tons of stone from the collapsing canyon walls.

At the Outreach summit, he mediated disputes among the other young nobles and distinguished himself as their greatest warrior, defeating five opposing BattleMechs in a Clan-style Trial of Position.

Eschewing Jaime Wolf's offer of a *Daishi*, he chose to honor his parents by keeping his family 'Mech, *Yen-Lo-Wang*, which he later used to enable Victor's escape on Alyina.

Trapped behind Falcon lines, Kai worked with Dr. Deirdre Lear to survive—evading, outwitting, and outfighting bounty hunters, ComStar, and the Jade Falcon garrison. Kai and Deirdre developed feelings for each other, but their relationship was complicated by the fact that her father had died at Justin Allard's hands. Kai earned Falcon commander Taman Malthus' respect and fought alongside him to liberate Alyina during Operation Scorpion.

Following the Truce of Tukayyid, Kai relocated to Solaris VII and assumed control of Teng Stables, renaming it Cenotaph. He followed in his father's footsteps, becoming a gladiatorial champion, and used his influence to clean up corruption on the Game World. Though he considered himself merely a warrior, eschewing politics, he found himself enmeshed in the schemes of his uncle, Mandrinn Tormano Liao, who sought to use Kai against his cousin, Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao. Tormano discovered Deirdre had borne Kai's son, David, and kidnapped them to use as leverage, prompting Kai to seize control of Tormano's Free Capella organization and take a more active role in interstellar politics, Deirdre and David at his side. With their support, he finally left behind the fears that had dominated his psyche—of failing his parents and of what he might do if he fully unleashed his warrior spirit. He used his influence to aid charitable causes and promote Capellan culture.

Kai helped Victor forge the Second Star League on Coventry, led St. Ives forces in Operation Bulldog against Clan Smoke Jaguar, and traveled to Strana Mechty, where he defeated Khan Vlad Ward in single combat while their units battled each other to a draw in the Great Refusal. Returning to the Inner Sphere, he soon found his mother's realm, the St. Ives Compact, invaded by Sun-Tzu's forces in the Xin Sheng War. Despite his heroic efforts, St. Ives was defeated and House Allard-Liao agreed to a negotiated peace that reincorporated the Compact into the Confederation, requiring Kai to pledge fealty to Sun-Tzu.

During the Jihad, Kai became a pawn—first kidnapped by the infamous Bounty Hunter when George Hasek sought to trigger a popular uprising on St. Ives, then reclaimed for the Confederation by Death Commandos. However, as he once advised Peter Steiner-Davion, "pawns that win through battles, that survive to the final rank on the board, become very powerful." Kai removed himself from Sun-Tzu's grasp by defecting to Devlin Stone's Republic of the Sphere, where he served as the Lord Governor of Prefecture V. He emerged from retirement to fight for the Republic against the Confederation, leading a final campaign that ended with his death on Liao in 3113.

CN9-YLW2 CENTURION

YEN-LO-WANG

POWER PLANT	MIATA 200 XL	MASS	50 TONS	CRUISING SPEED	43 KPH
COMM SYSTEM	COREAN TRANSBAND-J9	CHASSIS	COREAN MODEL K7	MAXIMUM SPEED	64 KPH
T&T SYSTEM	COREAN B-TECH	ARMAMENT	1 VON RYAN RAIL GUN	JUMP JETS	NONE
ARMOR	STARGUARD III		3 SPITFIRE MEDIUM PULSE LASERS	JUMP CAPACITY	NONE
			1 HATCHET		

One of the most famous BattleMechs in the Inner Sphere, *Yen-Lo-Wang* was first piloted by Justin Allard on Solaris VII, seizing the popular imagination as it won impressive victories during Allard's march to the 3027 Championship. Named for the Han god of the underworld and king of the nine hells, and painted in a bold red-and-white color scheme, Allard's modification—including upgrading the Luxor D-Series autocannon to the deadly Pontiac 100 and adding reinforced blades to its fingers—helped him achieve numerous arena victories.

Justin gifted *Yen-Lo-Wang* to his son Kai upon the young man's graduation from the New Avalon Military Academy, and oversaw its 3051 refit, adding Spitfire pulse lasers and replacing the Pontiac 100 with a Von Ryan Rail Gun while upgrading the engine to an extra-light Miata 200. Triple-strength myomers enhanced both its speed and up-close hitting power. These features enabled Kai to save Victor Steiner-Davion from the Jade Falcons on Alyina, sending *Yen-Lo-Wang* hurtling across the battlefield to shatter OmniMechs threatening the Prince before grappling with a final opponent and sending them both plunging over a cliff into the depths of the Mar Negro.

Recovered from the ocean shelf after Operation Scorpion, *Yen-Lo-Wang* returned to Solaris VII where it carried Kai to the Championship in 3055 and 3056. Kai again took *Yen-Lo-Wang* into battle during Operation Bulldog and in the Xin Sheng War, fighting Capellan forces with such ferocity that they referred to him as "The Kai Allard-Liao Front." After St. Ives' capitulation, Chancellor Sun-Tzu authorized Kai to deploy *Yen-Lo-Wang* on New Avalon supporting Victor's forces. Kai mounted his family 'Mech one

final time during the Capellan Crusades, ending a legendary string of victories with his death and the 'Mech's retrieval.

Yen-Lo-Wang reappeared in the 3120s, now bearing a hatchet and shield, and propelled its new mistress, Danaï Liao-Centrella, to glory in the Solaris arenas and on post-Blackout battlefields.



KAI ALLARD-LIAO



POSITION/RANK	SAKHAN (CLAN WOLF); KHAN (CLAN WOLF-IN-EXILE)
AFFILIATION/UNIT	CLAN WOLF, CLAN WOLF-IN-EXILE
BIRTH YEAR	3031

Born a warrior, the Phelan Kell who was expelled from the Nagelring and drifted into service with his family's Kell Hounds in 3049 little resembled the poised, confident, self-possessed saKhan who emerged from the Clan Invasion and would eventually lead a large swath of his adopted Clan into exile.

Phelan's capture by Clan Wolf on The Rock in 3049 is regarded by some as the start of the Clan Invasion, but it was undoubtedly a watershed moment in the young man's life. Swiftly finding a place among the Wolves, Phelan became a trusted bondsman to Khan Ulric Kerensky, advising him on ways to advance the invasion more bloodlessly, and bid against his rival Clans more efficiently. Upon the Clans' return to their Homeworlds during the year of peace, the freebirth Phelan was formally adopted as a warrior, only the first of several increasingly astounding feats he would accomplish. Thanks to his matrilineal blood ties to the Ward line, Phelan was allowed to compete for and eventually win that Bloodname, before rising to saKhan under the famed Natasha Kerensky.

Following the Truce of Tukayyid, saKhan Phelan led a contingent of Wolves which worked closely with the Hounds and Federated Commonwealth leaders during the Red Corsair affair of 3054-3055, reclaiming some measure of personal trust from both parties. This trust would prove critical when Phelan became the vessel for the Wolves' Warden soul during the Refusal War. Knowing that they themselves were unlikely to survive the conflict, Ulric and Natasha entrusted Phelan with the bulk of the Warden Wolves' warriors and assets, and charged him to find sanctuary for them among his people on Arc-Royal.

Phelan's exiled Wolves found their footing after a rocky first few years in their new home, regaining enough strength by 3059 to take part in Operation Bulldog against the Smoke Jaguars. As a consultant at the first Whitting Conference, Phelan himself was one of the architects of that campaign and the Inner Sphere's overall strategy against the Clans. In his prime as a warrior and a commander, Phelan joined Peter Steiner-Davion's Lyran coalition in the final assault on Tharkad during the FedCom Civil War, and led his Wolves into Stone's coalition during the Jihad. The latter war proved personally tragic for Phelan, when his beloved Ranna Kerensky was killed on Chara in 3077.

Her loss and the ensuing time of peace after the Jihad renewed Phelan's focus on securing the Exiles' home on Arc-Royal, and ensuring their future beyond his generation of warriors. As he entered his early seventies, Phelan's skill as a political leader grew, as did his popularity among his Exiled Wolves and Arc-Royal residents alike. His close relationship with his sister, Caitlin, and later with her children Evan and Martin, ensured tight cooperation between the Wolves and the Kell Hounds in defense of the coreward Lyran border.

The Exiled Wolves lost their beloved Khan in 3108 during a spiteful Jade Falcon raid against one of their key factory sites. Offended by the Exiles' growing power base, the Falcons used a pirate jump point and a lightning strike through the Arc-Royal space defenses to land two Trinaries outside Wolf Site 3. Personally instructing a trio of small training *sibkos* in the area, Khan Phelan responded to the incursion and engaged the Falcon force as it opened fire on the factory without regard to the large number of Wolf and Arc-Royal citizens present within. Phelan pushed himself and his young charges beyond their limits to drive off the invaders, but succumbed to the effects of multiple cockpit hits during the final moments of the battle. In defense of Wolf and Lyran citizens together, he was the lone fatality among the Exiles that day.

WOLFHOUND IIC

GRINNER

POWER PLANT	210 FUSION XL	MASS	35 TONS	CRUISING SPEED	64 KPH
COMM SYSTEM	SERIES (TYPE 3) WITH ECM	CHASSIS	TYPE A ENDO STEEL	MAXIMUM SPEED	97 KPH
T&T SYSTEM	SERIES V OPT	ARMAMENT	1 SERIES 7K EXTENDED-RANGE LARGE LASER	JUMP JETS	NONE
ARMOR	COMPOSITE A-2 FERRO-FIBROUS		1 SERIES 2B EXTENDED-RANGE MEDIUM LASER	JUMP CAPACITY	NONE
			3 KOLIBRI OMEGA SERIES MEDIUM PULSE LASERS		

Phelan Kell's capture on The Rock granted the Wolves a glimpse at a BattleMech completely unknown to the Clans until that moment: his *Wolfhound* WLF-1, nicknamed *Grinner*. Though most of the 'Mech was destroyed in that encounter, the full head ejection assembly which saved its pilot's life was meticulously studied by Wolf scientists. After Phelan Wolf's adoption into the warrior caste on Strana Mechty, he was reunited with a reincarnated *Grinner*, now fully transformed into a unique *Wolfhound IIC* thanks to plans stored in its cockpit databanks.

Grinner received a complete ClanTech upgrade, including an endo-steel structure, ferro-fibrous armor, an XL engine, fourteen double heat sinks and an ECM suite. The right arm's large laser was upgraded to an ER model, as was the rear-facing medium laser, and the three chest-mounted medium lasers were swapped out for pulse lasers. Though Wolf technicians initially intended to add an anti-missile system, they ultimately chose not to violate the *Wolfhound's* ammunition-free original design.

Phelan first piloted *Grinner* during the Thirteenth Wolf Guards' assault on Satalice, where its surprising appearance among the Wolf forces caused analysts to initially mistake its weapons loadout. *Grinner* took part in the Battle of Tukayyid, and carried Phelan to his successful claiming of a Bloodname later that year.

Despite subsequently piloting a number of other 'Mechs, Khan Phelan continually trained on *Grinner*. Though hesitant to risk such a personally important possession in front-line combat, well into his seventies he took occasional impish delight in piloting it against new warriors undergoing their Trial of Position.

As Phelan's journey as Clan warrior began at *Grinner's* controls, it is perhaps apropos that it ended there as well; the Exiled Khan was piloting his beloved 'Mech when the Falcons launched their fateful 3108 raid. Following his death, *Grinner* was

salvaged, repaired, and stood in a place of honor in Old Connaught as a reminder of the deep ties between the Kell Hounds and Exiled Wolves. The 'Mech's fate following the Falcon occupation of Arc-Royal has not been determined.



PHELAN KELL

**POSITION/RANK**

KHAN

AFFILIATION/UNIT

CLAN WOLF

BIRTH YEAR

3026

Perspective matters when judging a man such as Vladimir Ward. To some, he was a knife at the throat of the Inner Sphere, untrustworthy and unpredictable. To others, just an upstart whelp, the least deplorable of the dregs of a broken Clan. To Clan Wolf, shattered in spirit and *touman*, he was nothing less than a savior who reforged them from the bloody scraps left after the Refusal War. Many saw Vlad as a late bloomer, not even earning his Bloodname until after age thirty. In truth, as a fervent Crusader in a Warden-dominated Clan, Vlad never had the chance to rise until the sundering of Clan Wolf, when he became free to shape the destiny of a new breed of Crusader Wolves.

Strong personalities will gather rivals like a lodestone to filings, and Vlad collected his greatest one early on. Fate brought Vlad together with Phelan Kell early in the Invasion, beginning a decades-long feud in which Vlad could never gain the upper hand. Phelan bested Vlad in every fight, claimed the Bloodname

on which Vlad had set his sights, and ascended to saKhan, leaving Vlad a minority in a Clan led by two of the people he had come to conquer. Vlad's hatred of Phelan was ultimately futile, as they never got to settle their differences. They remained dark mirrors of each other, each a leader of his own pack of Wolves.

Vlad's rise began with an attempt to discredit ilKhan Ulric Kerensky and repudiate the Truce of Tukayyid, which led directly to war with the Jade Falcons and the sundering of the Wolves. When the dust settled, Ulric and Khan Natasha Kerensky were dead, Phelan had fled with the Warden Wolves, and no Wolf warrior stood to oppose the Falcon absorption of Clan Wolf. None, except Vlad of the Wards. He killed Khan Vandervahn Chistu to repudiate the absorption, then killed Elias Crichell moments after Crichell connived his way into the ilKhan's seat. As Khan, Vlad then took his Clan back in name as well as spirit.

The Wolves' path to rebuilding meant conflict with other Clans but a respectful distance from the Inner Sphere, as long as the truce held. The next time the Wolves faced Spheroid forces, that truce was in flux. The Great Refusal presented Vlad with another Inner Sphere warrior besides Phelan whom he admitted filled him with unease. Vlad's Wolves faced the First St. Ives Lancers, led by Kai Allard-Liao, champion of Solaris VII. No Clan believed that this insignificant unit from a rump state led by a show warrior could threaten the might of the Wolves—until they did. SaKhan Marielle Radick records in her journals that Vlad accepted a draw because Kai had earned it, for showcasing the dangers of underestimating the Inner Sphere if nothing else.

Among the greatest controversies of Vlad's Khanship was his relationship with Katherine Steiner-Davion. Seizing the disgraced former Archon before her brother could imprison her, Vlad gave her a place of honor in Clan Wolf, providing MechWarrior training and compelling her to undergo a Trial of Position to achieve warrior status, dubious though it was. Vlad's opponents whispered that the Lyran witch had sunk her fangs in his neck, and that she now controlled Clan Wolf. Vlad put them all down, and kept Katherine close. It was she who urged Vlad to support Devlin Stone's coalition, because her brother supported Stone, and she had learned that no matter how much she hated him, Victor always won.

Even his detractors agreed that Vlad never made a move without considering how it could strengthen the Wolf Clan, a goal he worked tirelessly toward until the moment of his death. During a Harvest Trial against Clan Hell's Horses, Vlad Ward died as he had lived, fighting for the glory of Clan Wolf.

TIMBER WOLF [PRIME]

WARRANT

POWER PLANT	STARFIRE 375 XL	MASS	75 TONS	CRUISING SPEED	54 KPH
COMM SYSTEM	KHAN SERIES (TYPE 2C)	CHASSIS	TYPE W3 ENDO-STEEL	MAXIMUM SPEED	86 KPH
T&T SYSTEM	SERIES III OPT	ARMAMENT	2 SERIES 6B EXTENDED-RANGE LARGE LASERS	JUMP JETS	NONE
ARMOR	COMPOSITE A-2 FERRO-FIBROUS		2 SERIES 2B EXTENDED-RANGE MEDIUM LASERS	JUMP CAPACITY	NONE
			1 KOLIBRI OMEGA SERIES MEDIUM PULSE LASER		
			2 TYPE XX "GREAT BOW" LRM-20 LAUNCHERS		
			1 SERIES 1 EXTENDED-RANGE SMALL LASER		
			2 SERIES IX MACHINE GUNS		

No BattleMech embodies the ways of the Wolf better than their signature *Timber Wolf*. Vlad felt a kinship with the 'Mech early on in his career, and rarely piloted anything else after the Refusal War. In order to never become complacent, and to familiarize himself with new weapons as they were developed, Vlad changed out his Omni pods often. No enemy could be sure what configuration they would face, which only worked to Vlad's advantage.

Dissatisfied with his Clan's extremely long supply lines and correctly sensing that the Wolves would soon have no place in the Homeworlds, Vlad constructed a new factory on the world of Weingarten, and its first product would be new *Timber Wolves*. Slower production rates meant that these new 'Mechs were assigned to warriors with impeccable codices.

Khan Vlad's 'Mech met a messy end along with him, facing a Hell's Horses *Hellstar* on Rodigo. The assault 'Mech had maneuvered behind Vlad's position, and hit the Khan's already-damaged 'Mech with a quadruple PPC blast. Few 'Mechs could have survived, and the *Timber Wolf* Vlad had finally settled on late in his warrior career died with him. Its remains were salvaged by the Hells Horses, but in early 3084 a Goliath Scorpion Seeker Star arrived on Rodigo and challenged for the repaired 'Mech. The flummoxed Horses allowed the Trial; bidding came down to a fencing match officiated by Star Colonel Yul DeLaurel. Star Commander Nexin and his Star departed the world with their prize but without a word of explanation.



VLAD WARD



POSITION/RANK

ILKHAN

AFFILIATION/UNIT

CLAN WOLF

BIRTH YEAR

2997

A standout in his *sibko*, Ulric's intelligence and amazing hand-eye coordination brought him to the attention of Khan Kerlin Ward, who mentored the *ristar* in the Warden philosophy and how to navigate often-lethal Clan politics. Though a skilled combatant, Ulric waited years for a prestigious Kerensky Bloodright to become available in 3027, and became Khan with Kerlin's support shortly thereafter.

Ulric sought to undercut the Crusader movement, which he viewed as a perversion of Nicholas Kerensky's mandate, by blocking its drive to invade the Inner Sphere. In 3048, following the appearance of ComStar's *Outbound Light* vessel over Huntress, Ulric was unable to prevent a Crusader motion for invasion from coming to a vote in the Grand Council, but nonetheless nearly won a brutal Trial of Refusal that left many Crusader participants crippled or dead.

Forced by the Grand Council to join Operation Revival, with his Wolves representing the spirit of Great Founder Nicholas Kerensky, Ulric planned to advance the Warden agenda by reaching Terra first

and dictating Clan-Inner Sphere relations as ilClan. He accelerated the invasion timetable, forcing the Crusaders to scramble to keep pace, and shamed the other Clans into abstaining from orbital bombardment. Understanding that, if successful in conquering the Inner Sphere, the Clans would need to live with its citizens, Ulric identified and elevated captured Spheroids with leadership potential, such as Ragnar Magnusson and Phelan Kell, intending them to serve as living bridges between long-separated cultures.

Upon the death of ilKhan Leo Showers, the Crusaders schemed to elevate Ulric to the position, intending Crusader-aligned Wolves to succeed him. Ulric, displaying his mastery of Clan politics, used Loremaster Conal Ward's own careless words against him, and appointed Natasha Kerensky as new Khan of the Wolves. As ilKhan, he brought reserve Clans into the Inner Sphere, weakening the most ardent Crusaders by making them share their invasion corridors with rival Clans.

After the Battle of Luthien, he revealed to ComStar Precentor Martial Anastasius Focht that the Clans' ultimate goal was Terra itself, and negotiated a proxy Trial of Possession for mankind's birthplace on the world of Tukayyid. With his counsel as ilKhan rejected by the other six Clans, Ulric prepared his Wolves for a lengthy campaign and led his forces to victory over ComStar while the other Clans battled to a draw or went down to ignominious defeat. Per his agreement with Focht, Ulric imposed a fifteen-year truce, during which no Clan would come closer to Terra than fateful Tukayyid.

Ulric spent the post-Tukayyid years defending himself against charges that he had intentionally sabotaged Operation Revival, and that the Truce of Tukayyid was, in fact, an act of genocide that would prevent new generations of Clan warriors from being blooded. When the allegations rose to the Grand Council, Ulric was formally stripped of his role as ilKhan. For his Trial of Refusal, Ulric unleashed his plan to cripple Crusader ambitions by bidding the entire Wolf *touman*, touching off the Refusal War. Bluntly admitting that he intended to strike a blow for the Warden movement by leading the most hardcore Crusaders of Clan Wolf in a suicidal campaign to cripple the Jade Falcon Touman, Ulric's Task Force Delta savaged numerous Jade Falcon Clusters before he finally succumbed to an ambush on Wotan.

He left the Warden Wolves under the command of Khan Phelan with a final message: "You are embarking on a grand mission that will shape the future of our Clan, the Inner Sphere, and humanity—to defend the Inner Sphere from the threat represented by the Clans. This, I say, is your destiny as Wolves, and from it you shall not shy."

GARGOYLE [PRIME]

GARMR

POWER PLANT	400 MODEL SF-3 XL	MASS	80 TONS	CRUISING SPEED	54 KPH
COMM SYSTEM	RALDON R1	CHASSIS	CLAN SERIES ASSAULT SXC	MAXIMUM SPEED	86 KPH
T&T SYSTEM	VERSION KAPPA-III TTS	ARMAMENT	2 TYPE 1 SRM SIX-SHOOTERS	JUMP JETS	NONE
ARMOR	FORGING C629/J FERRO-FIBROUS		2 TYPE OVR-X LB 5-X AUTOCANNONS	JUMP CAPACITY	NONE
			1 SERIES 1 EXTENDED-RANGE SMALL LASER		

Ulric demonstrated his prowess as a MechWarrior and a tactician at the Mars Field Proving Ground on Strana Mechty in 3048, when he led the Third Battle Cluster in a Trial of Refusal against Operation Revival at four-to-one odds. With his *Gargoyle*, which he favored for its exceptional combination of speed, flexibility, and firepower, Ulric first faced the Ghost Bear Khans in single combat and slew both, then served as bait to draw the Jade Falcons into a trap. Having scattered half his opponents, Ulric directed the Third Battle Cluster (The Silver Devils) to hold their ground against the Fourth Jaguar Dragoons and Clan Burrock's Fifteenth Rapier cluster. Weakened by prior fighting, the Wolf line split, leaving outnumbered Wolf warriors fighting hopeless duels and dropping one by one. In his barely operational *Gargoyle*, Ulric, one of the last Wolves standing, challenged Star Colonel Showers' almost pristine *Warhawk* to single combat. In defense of the Warden ethos, Ulric's impassioned assault nearly carried the day, stunning Showers with a missile strike to the cockpit. Only a lucky particle cannon discharge decided the outcome, disabling Ulric's OmniMech.

Ulric led Task Force Delta from the seat of his *Gargoyle*, moving quickly and smashing through Falcon garrisons on Zoetermeer, Leskovik, Evciler, and Butler. On Wotan, answering Falcon saKhan Chistu's challenge, Ulric led his Wolves in running battles through the streets of Borealtown. Finding Chistu in the heart of the city, Ulric moved to engage his *Executioner*.

Without warning, salvo after salvo of missiles rained down on Ulric and his men in a *dezgra* Jade Falcon ambush. As death descended, Ulric lunged his *Gargoyle* forward, arms reaching for his foe. Brilliant fire swept over the 'Mech, smothering it like a blanket and leaving a blackened silhouette that took a final step forward, then disintegrated into ash.



ULRIC KERENSKY



POSITION/RANK	STAR COLONEL
AFFILIATION/UNIT	CLAN JADE FALCON
BIRTH YEAR	3012

The legend of Aidan Pryde and his impact on succeeding generations of Jade Falcon warriors is difficult to communicate with words on a page, for they are insufficient to capture the essence of the Jade Phoenix.

From his first day as a cadet, Aidan exhibited the uncompromising spirit and absolute refusal to accept defeat which defines a Clan warrior. Unfortunately, the cadet who had drawn many eyes before his Trial of Position failed that Trial, causing those eyes to turn away. Fate was not through with Aidan, nor was his old Falconer Commander, Ter Roshak. Roshak implemented a scheme that allowed Aidan a second Trial of Position, a ploy that would tarnish the honor of all involved. Aidan was given an assumed identity and inserted into a freebirth *sibko*. Living as a freebirth erased any of the stereotypical Falcon prejudice that Aidan felt toward them, and gave him a new perspective which he used to achieve victory in his new Trial. Aidan was a warrior at last.

Eventually, Aidan cast off his freebirth identity of Jorge, proudly announcing his claim to the Pryde Bloodname, a debacle that sent him into a series of trials that would

have crushed a lesser man. Immense forces gathered against him, but it was not in Aidan's nature to back down. After winning a Trail of Refusal, conquering the Grand Melee, and crushing five contenders determined to kill him for dishonoring their Bloodhouse, Aidan emerged as Aidan Pryde.

Despite every effort to keep him down, Aidan Pryde climbed in rank. Perhaps his commanding officers, blinded by a haze of prejudice, could not stop a phoenix from rising, but they could limit how he rose. Aidan commanded the dregs, freebirths and *solahma* that no other commander wanted, but he never considered his assignment shameful. He achieved the rank of Star Colonel by challenging Cortland Clees of the Eighth Falcon Regulars, after Clees wasted a Star of Aidan's warriors rooting out a Steel Viper trap, ordering them to their deaths simply because they were freebirths. Clees chose to duel with katanas, and promised to take Aidan Pryde's head as a trophy. Aidan allowed Clees to run him through just to get close enough to grab the Star Colonel's hand and pin him in place. Then Aidan jammed his katana up under Cortland Clees' chin, and claimed his rank, but not his unit. Aidan was instead shunted a less reputable Cluster, along with his remaining freebirths.

When the vote for the invasion of the Inner Sphere came, the Jade Falcons chose the most honored among their Clan, and Aidan Pryde and his misfits were to be left behind. Aidan challenged, as his superiors knew he would, and he won, as they feared. The Jade Phoenix killed two Bloodnamed warriors for the right of his malcontents, *solahma* and freebirths to walk on the hallowed worlds of the Star League, though they were not allowed a combat role, only mop-up and pacification duties. Then came Twycross. Star Colonel Adler Malthus lost the Falcon Guards in the Great Gash, and finally there was a name more reviled than Aidan's. Aidan was given command of the reconstituted Falcon Guards, now the most *dezgra* unit in his Clan.

By the time of Tukayyid, his Guards were in top fighting form, and to the shock of all involved, performed like it. Tukayyid was a disaster for all the Clans, but the Falcons were able to achieve a draw. The cost was Aidan Pryde himself, but in death he finally gained the recognition he had long been denied. Every Jade Falcon recognized that it was Aidan's plans, Aidan's leadership, and Aidan's determination that earned them even this shard of victory. There is little doubt that had he lived, Aidan Pryde would have risen to Khan.

Aidan Pryde gave his life so that MechWarrior Diana, his own freebirth daughter, could be rescued from the field, dying in a way that was, paradoxically, both antithetical to the Clans and exemplified their deepest ideals. Given that Diana would go on to be the first freebirth to win a Bloodname in Clan Jade Falcon, and be instrumental in driving Clan Steel Viper from the Inner Sphere, Aidan Pryde's sacrifice was well made.

TIMBER WOLF [PRYDE]

POWER PLANT	STARFIRE 375 XL
COMM SYSTEM	KHAN SERIES (TYPE 2C)
T&T SYSTEM	SERIES III OPT
ARMOR	COMPOSITE A-2 FERRO-FIBROUS

MASS	75 TONS
CHASSIS	TYPE W3 ENDO-STEEL
ARMAMENT	2 SERIES 6B EXTENDED-RANGE LARGE LASERS
	2 SERIES 2B EXTENDED-RANGE MEDIUM LASERS
	2 TYPE XX "GREAT BOW" LRM-20 LAUNCHERS
	1 SERIES 1 EXTENDED-RANGE SMALL LASER

DEATHTRAP

CRUISING SPEED	54 KPH
MAXIMUM SPEED	86 KPH
JUMP JETS	JF STANDARD
JUMP CAPACITY	120 METERS

From his first Trial of Position, through his tumultuous Bloodright Trials, and across the majority of his career as a warrior, Aidan Pryde piloted a *Summoner*. His specialization on that 'Mech made him one of the greatest *Summoner* pilots of all time, but the battle of Quarrel was the last ride for that old war horse. Aidan was forced into a new 'Mech, and chose the machine notoriously known as *Deathtrap*, a *Timber Wolf* with a disturbing list of dead and crippled pilots.

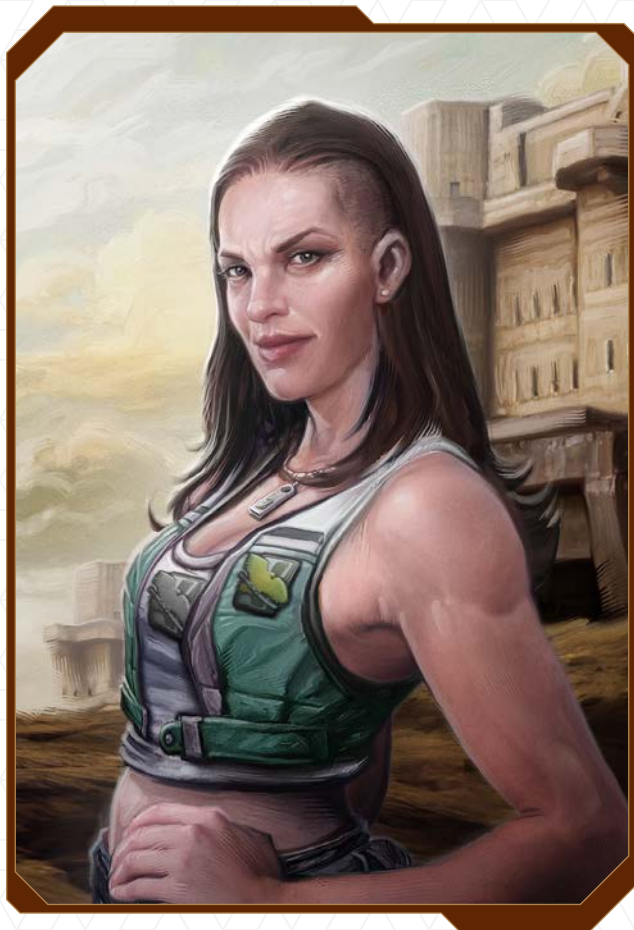
Aidan himself put no merit in the idea of a jinxed machine. To him, a 'Mech was simply a 'Mech; any loss of life or limb was the fault of the pilot. *Deathtrap* gained jump jets to better mirror Aidan's lost *Summoner*, but otherwise remained a standard *Timber Wolf*, if one with an occasional unexplained glitch. Jump jets were a critical part of Aidan's plan to cross the Prezno River on Tukayyid, and without the foresight to add them, Aidan could not have led his troops to victory.

Superstition or not, *Deathtrap* added the name of Aidan Pryde to its list of honored dead, but before meeting their mutual doom, Aidan and the 'Mech fought as one, a phantom on the field of war and a scourge on the Com Guards who dared challenge them. Aidan is said to have dispatched over a dozen ComStar 'Mechs in his final moments, a legendary feat for a legendary man.

Even after extracting Aidan's body and returning it to the Jade Falcons with the other war dead, ComStar refused to salvage his *Timber Wolf*. Little of value remained in the wreckage, save an untouched small laser. *Deathtrap* and all the Com Guard 'Mechs that fell to it were left in situ, a monument to the bravery of the Jade Phoenix.



AIDAN PRYDE



POSITION/RANK

KHAN

AFFILIATION/UNIT

CLAN JADE FALCON

BIRTH YEAR

3012

Unlike her *sibkin*, Aidan, Marthe did not chafe under authority. Hers was a much more cunning intellect; she knew when to staunchly obey the rules, and when to leave them shattered before her ambitions. Though not given to wild risks, she was known to stick her neck out if the conditions were favorable, such as when she supported Aidan in his bid for a Bloodname. Everything Marthe achieved honed her political acumen, her warrior skill, and the Jade Falcon's glory. Not until Malvina Hazen did the Falcons have a Khan as successful.

Marthe's rise to Star Colonel was a steady climb marked by a chain of competent successes, but little of true note. Her elevation to Khan in the wake of the Refusal War surprised even her, as Marthe suddenly found herself responsible for the destiny of her entire Clan—and most surprising of all, she owed it to a Wolf. Vlad Ward's execution of Marthe's predecessors left her in charge of a weakened Clan, at a time when her peers were smacking their lips in anticipation of feasting on the Falcon's corpse.

Marthe's *detente* with Khan Ward allowed her to enact her boldest plan yet—the invasion of Coventry. Marthe riled the Lyran Alliance with a drive whose target appeared to be Tharkad itself, but in truth was a ruse to lure out the Alliance's best units. The Falcons needed to prove their strength, and blood the fresh warriors who now comprised the majority of Marthe's *touman*. Her plan worked; the Falcons grew stronger, but at a price even a clairvoyant could never foresee.

The Coventry offensive lit a fire in the Inner Sphere that reminded the House Lords of the might of the Clans, and the ticking clock of Tukayyid. Marthe Pryde's little war became the unintended catalyst for the Great Refusal and the death of the Smoke Jaguars, fiercest of the Clans, under the guns of the Second Star League. Marthe's gambit saved the Jade Falcons, but the price was a shield around Mother Terra that no Clan could penetrate. The Great Crusade was over, but the Falcons would fight on.

The ensuing years greatly tested Marthe's Falcons. Clashes with the Lyrans, Clans Steel Viper and Ice Hellion, and the Falcons' own scientist caste cost the Clan dearly. Marthe Pryde proved their equal, relocating her Clan to their Inner Sphere holdings amid heavy predation from the Homeworld Clans, consolidating Falcon dominion over their occupation zone, and fending off all threats with the brutal efficiency only a Jade Falcon can muster. When the dust from the Wars of Reaving settled, only the Word of Blake remained a threat, but it was one that Marthe Pryde would not see defeated.

The Jade Falcons rarely speak of Marthe's end, calling it an internal Clan matter. Her death did not come in battle, but rather due to an act of jealous rage. MechWarrior Bret, a *solahma* warrior and Khan Marthe's own *sibkin*, had grown bitter after watching her rise without ever offering him a hand up. The execution of his freebirth sons during the purge of the scientist caste unhinged Bret, and he tampered with Marthe's 'Mech, causing a premature ejection during battle. Marthe survived, though grievously injured. Sensing the Watch inquisition closing in, Bret confronted a recovering Marthe in her quarters, intent on ending her. If not for her injuries, Marthe may have survived the fight. As it was, two souls who came into this life together left it together, but only one will be remembered.

SUMMONER [PRIME]

THESEUS

POWER PLANT	REDLINE 350 XL	MASS	70 TONS	CRUISING SPEED	54 KPH
COMM SYSTEM	MODEL J-D 067	CHASSIS	JFS-703	MAXIMUM SPEED	86 KPH
T&T SYSTEM	HAWKEYE 58	ARMAMENT	1 TALON 5 EXTENDED-RANGE PPC	JUMP JETS	JF STANDARD
ARMOR	J63-3E FERRO FIBROUS		1 TYPE KOV LB-10X AUTOCANNON 1 TYPE XV "CROSSBOW" LRM-15 LAUNCHER	JUMP CAPACITY	150 METERS



Though she was qualified to pilot all Falcon OmniMechs, Marthe Pryde always returned to the seat of a *Summoner*. She liked the familiar comfort of seventy tons of highly mobile war machine more than the firepower of a lumbering assault 'Mech, even if it meant taking a bit longer to kill a foe. One of her favorite adages was that the greatest wall of firepower and armor is of no use if you cannot place it where you need to, when you need to. Marthe's most infamous use of a *Summoner* was during her Trial of Position, when she shot her *sibmate* Aidan in the back after he initiated a melee, guaranteeing herself a spot in the *touman* and relegating Aidan to the role of technician.

Though she always claimed that her controversial attack was merely exploiting an advantage, later in life she admitted to being offended by Aidan's audacity. Her *Summoner* gutted his own with a single shot, due in part to Marthe's deep familiarity with the 'Mech and its pilot.

Marthe kept the same machine over the years, insisting on repairing it no matter the amount of damage, leading her personal tech to call it the "Summoner of Theseus," or simply *Theseus*. *Theseus* served the *touman* long after Marthe's death, but was eventually superseded by the *Grand Summoner*, and relegated to a training role. It was destroyed in a Trial of Position in 3120, fulfilling its duty to die so that a new Jade Falcon warrior could be born.

MARTHE PRYDE



POSITION/RANK	ARCHON
AFFILIATION/UNIT	LYRAN COMMONWEALTH
BIRTH YEAR	3024

Growing up on Somerset, Adam Steiner never expected to do more than serve his nation and perhaps command a regiment in some bold campaign against House Kurita. But fate has a way of ignoring the preconceived notions of men; by the time of his death, Adam Steiner was the most important man in the Lyrans nation.

His rise began, as did so many great destinies, with the Clan Invasion. At the time, he lived on Tharkad as an instructor at the Nagelring, spreading his innovative brand of tactics to a new generation of FedCom MechWarriors. For the first few months of the invasion, Adam knew no more than the average Lyrans citizen, that a few border worlds had been hit by Periphery raiders. Rumors blew like embers on the wind, but he discounted them. It wasn't until the fall of Somerset, his home planet, that the seriousness of the conflict struck home.

Adam's exploits with his irregular unit, the First Somerset Strikers, became the stuff of wartime legend, turning fear among the masses into a national pride unseen since the Fourth Succession War. The holodrama based on his exploits and the subsequent feud with his nemesis Nicolai Malthus drove recruitment in the AFFC to its highest level ever. After the Truce of Tukayyid, Adam dedicated his time to teaching anti-Clan tactics, often touring with Jason Youngblood of the Crescent Hawks, whose similar experiences complemented his own. In 3055, the two joined forces in a raid to capture Ciro Ramirez, a Nagelring graduate who had become a fervent Jade Falcon warrior. Ciro's resulting trial tested the bounds of what qualified as treason, and whether being bondsman to a Clan counted as brainwashing.

The FedCom Civil War saw Adam's faith in the Steiner-Davion line wane. To him, both of his cousins seemed bent on destroying the Lyrans realm, but it was Victor who helped Adam repel another Jade Falcon incursion, gaining Adam's neutrality if not his support. After the war, Archon Peter Steiner-Davion took pains to regain Adam's trust, promoting him to General of the Armies, then briefly ceding the Archonship to him during the Jihad. Though Adam handed it back, the position became permanent upon Peter's assassination by the Word of Blake.

Peter's last wish was for Adam to support Devlin Stone's coalition, but Adam remained skeptical. In early 3074, the two met, and Adam agreed to support Stone on the condition that Stone could defeat him in a strategic replaying of the Battle of Tukayyid. The game lasted thirteen hours, and ended with Adam's Clan force standing victorious. Stone prepared to depart, but Adam reminded him that in the Jihad he was not facing a Clan enemy, and his portrayal of the Com Guards displayed a deep understanding of ComStar doctrines, making him the best person to lead a coalition against their darkest incarnation. Adam pledged his nation's military support, but could not add his own tactical skills due to his commitment to the Lyrans government.

An Archon must have an heir, so in 3074 Adam married Heather Fyhne, daughter of the Duchess of Arcturus. As political unions go, it was as cordial as could be. Adam certainly loved his wife, but Fyhne was no MechWarrior, and could never fully understand her husband. Upon his death from heart failure in 3121, the holos found in his personal effects contained many images of Rachel Specter, his long-time friend and companion from Somerset.

AXM-1N AXMAN

GAUNTLET

POWER PLANT	MAGNA 260 XL	MASS	65 TONS	CRUISING SPEED	43 KPH
COMM SYSTEM	JOHNSTON WIDE BAND	CHASSIS	DORWINION AXM STANDARD	MAXIMUM SPEED	64 KPH
T&T SYSTEM	RANDER PINPOINT-HY	ARMAMENT	3 INTEK MEDIUM LASERS	JUMP JETS	HILDCO MODEL 12
ARMOR	KALLON UNITY WEAVE FERRO-FIBROUS WITH CASE		1 LUXOR DEVASTATOR-20 AUTOCANNON 1 SUTEL PRECISION LINE LARGE PULSE LASER	JUMP CAPACITY	120 METERS

The *Axman* was a relatively new creation when Adam Steiner was awarded one by his cousin, Archon Melissa Steiner-Davion. Developed as a bigger, meaner *Hatchetman*, the designers' expertise simply wasn't up to their ambition, and the *Axman* spent two decades in development hell before the Helm Memory Core revitalized manufacturing infrastructure. This delay ruined the 'Mech's reputation before it ever hit the field, relegating it to the same status as the *Blackjack* and *Charger*, until the Somerset Strikers holodrama worked its propaganda magic. The prominently featured *Axman* played a heroic role, and the court of public opinion shifted in turn. Demand for the 'Mech soared, leading to the construction of two new manufacturing lines in the Lyran state.

Though Adam's 'Mech was destroyed in his final confrontation with Nicolai Malthus on Somerset, its right arm was salvageable. Sent to a stockpile on Coventry, the arm never made it to a unit in need before Marthe Pryde brought her Jade Falcons to roost. The Falcons had little use for a melee weapon and three obsolete lasers, and tossed the arm to the scrapheap. The Seventy-first Light Horse, sent to help reclaim Coventry, found it very useful. Lieutenant Tansy Wellington, whose AXM-1N had lost both arms in the initial fighting, recognized the striped camouflage and distinct red ax, and confirmed its pedigree via serial numbers. Grafting the arm to her 'Mech, she proceeded to gleefully announce to every Jade Falcon that they faced the ax of Adam Steiner—drew a lot of extra fire for it.



ADAM STEINER



POSITION/RANK

STAR COLONEL

AFFILIATION/UNIT

CLAN JADE FALCON

BIRTH YEAR

3026

Haughty, arrogant, and just downright mean, Nicolai Malthus made few friends during his very violent life. The only graduate of his *sibko*, Nicolai entered the *touman* as a Star Commander, but did not hold that rank long. On the first day of his first assignment, he challenged Star Captain Micah Pershaw for command of their Trinary. Micah accepted, thinking to put this young *eyas* in his place, and died at the controls of his *Mad Dog*, shrieking as Nicolai's *Summoner* stomped in his cockpit.

Nicolai achieved his Bloodname at twenty, and the young *ristar* was taken in by Vandervahn Chistu, who hoped to use him to fulfill his own ambitions. At the start of Operation Revival, Chistu promoted Nicolai Malthus to Star Colonel, and gave him command of a special Cluster dubbed the Falcon's Claws. Though attached to Peregrine Galaxy, the Falcon's Claws operated outside the *touman's* normal organization. Malthus' command Star made up the unit's only permanent fixture, with Nicolai drawing troops from the whole of the Galaxy for each individual mission. During the early stages of the Invasion, Chistu played

Malthus off of his other protégé, Star Colonel Kristen Redmond. Their rivalry became a thing of legend, with both bidding dangerously low in an effort to upstage the other. The Falcon's Claws enjoyed a string of early victories, but soon came across an enemy they could not vanquish—Adam Steiner.

Steiner's own irregular unit, the Somerset Strikers, clashed with the Falcon's Claws across the Jade Falcon OZ, humiliating the vaunted Star Colonel more often than not. Over the ensuing months, Nicolai pursued Adam Steiner like Ahab chased the white whale, but Steiner was always a step ahead, always waiting with a plan into which Nicolai Malthus stumbled. Galaxy Commander Chistu grew frustrated with Malthus' failures and began to withdraw his support, making Malthus even more desperate.

Twycross represented a tipping point for the Malthus Bloodhouse. Adler Malthus' death and loss of the Falcon Guards to a single Inner Sphere warrior was a disgrace so profound that it spread to every Malthus, including the already questionable Nicolai. Demanding a chance at redemption, Nicolai Malthus assembled the best warriors in Peregrine Galaxy for his Falcon's Claws, and set out for Somerset to humiliate and destroy Adam Steiner. Fate spat on Nicolai one last time, as Steiner bested him again and Nicolai lost it all. Abandoned by Chistu, he was reduced to a mere Star Commander in a second-line formation, left to rot, laughed at by the *solahma* and freebirths he now commanded.

Adam Steiner went on to become Archon of the Lyran Commonwealth, and was lionized in a holodrama that depicted Malthus as a screaming, bumbling idiot. In 3063, Malthus demanded a Trial of Grievance against Steiner and the production company, claiming that their inaccurate portrayal of him cost his status as a Jade Falcon. Informed that he would have to file the proper paperwork in Lyran courts to obtain a trial, Malthus inadvertently found himself in the middle not of a Circle of Equals, but a most unusual lawsuit. The case was eventually thrown out of court, and Malthus was detained for threatening the judge after the jurist refused his *batchall*.

After six months in a Steiner prison, Malthus was repatriated to a Clan that no longer had any use for him, save for one man. Kael Pershaw took in the once-proud MechWarrior, offering him a final chance to serve the Jade Falcons as a member of the Watch. Given the choice between this or rotting as *solahma* infantry, Nicolai accepted. He carried out Pershaw's orders in a number of missions he would have once considered degrading, gaining in the process a better understanding of himself. The man who accompanied Pershaw to Etienne's Sanctuary in 3073 to end the Society's rebellion, and died there, was a far humbler one than the brash young Crusader of the 3050s.

SUMMONER [M]

POWER PLANT	REDLINE 350 XL	MASS	70 TONS	CRUISING SPEED	54 KPH
COMM SYSTEM	MODEL J-D 067	CHASSIS	JFS-703	MAXIMUM SPEED	86 KPH
T&T SYSTEM	HAWKEYE 58	ARMAMENT	1 TYPE XX EXTENDED-RANGE PPC		
ARMOR	J63-3E FERRO FIBROUS		1 TYPE KOV LB-10X AUTOCANNON		
			1 TYPE VI STREAK SRM-6		
			1 SERIES 1 EXTENDED-RANGE SMALL LASER		
			1 JF STANDARD		
			150 METERS		

Nicolai Malthus was neither the first nor last pilot of *Summoner* JF900-23C, only its most infamous. Malthus preferred a custom loadout that replaced the Prime configuration's long-range missiles with a Streak SRM for more efficient infighting. The Streak system's conservation of ammunition suited Nicolai's aggressive fighting style, ensuring he had a viable weapon long after he would have wasted his LRM ammo on iffy shots. Other warriors found merit in this array, officially adopting it as the *Summoner* M configuration, perhaps Malthus' only lasting contribution to the Clan Jade Falcon Touman.

In an ironic turn, the machine enjoyed a more successful career than the man. After Malthus was ignominiously shot out of it on Somerset by Adam Steiner, the salvaged *Summoner* went on to serve the Federated Commonwealth, Draconis Combine, and Republic of the Sphere. With the fragmenting of the Republic, it fell into the hands of Katana Tormark and her Dragon's Fury, and was given to one Antonia Chinn, who dubbed it *Kanazuchi*.

Chinn configured the 'Mech to roughly match a *Grand Summoner* D configuration, and made enough cosmetic enhancements to fool a casual observer into believing it was the more powerful model, a ruse that even worked on the agent who compiled a dossier on her for the Combine's Order of the Five Pillars. *Kanazuchi* was destroyed in 3143 on Piedmont during the final purge of rogue warlord Katana Tormark's forces. Chinn acquitted herself in a way worthy of a Jade Falcon, destroying three Kurita BattleMechs before succumbing.

After losing his *Summoner* and the respect of Vandervahn Chistu, Malthus passed through a series of second-line BattleMechs, eventually settling in a *Thresher*, the 'Mech in which he died on Etienne's Sanctuary.





POSITION/RANK	PRECENTOR MARTIAL (COM GUARDS)
AFFILIATION/UNIT	COMSTAR
BIRTH YEAR	2972

Very few people have made a lasting mark on the Inner Sphere; even fewer have done so across two lifetimes. The young Frederick Steiner aspired to many things for which he was ill-suited. Though he was one of the Lyran Commonwealth's finest generals, thoughts of high politics slithered into his head, aided by the forked tongue of Duke Aldo Lestrade of Skye. As Archon Alessandro Steiner lost his grip on power, Frederick nurtured dreams of overthrowing him, but Frederick's cousin Katrina moved first, deposing Alessandro herself. Frederick and Lestrade worked against the new Archon at every turn, though Frederick was never more than a puppet for the Duke—he simply lacked the devious mind for politics, and trusted Lestrade to act in their mutual interests. When Lestrade nearly succeeded in assassinating Katrina, the enraged Archon sent Frederick on a mission from which neither expected him to return.

Gravely injured by Theodore Kurita, Frederick underwent reconstructive surgery, though

nothing short of Clan science could have saved his right eye. He entered a Buddhist monastery to convalesce, where he had time to contemplate why his Archon had allowed him to die with honor, and why a sworn enemy had spared his life. The answer came in bits gleaned over weeks of introspection: because they were, both of them, better people than he. As the mythical Odin traded an eye for wisdom, so too did Frederick. Laying to rest the identity of Frederick Steiner alongside his failed ambitions, he took the name Anastasius Focht, the "soldier reborn," and vowed to live his new life in a way worthy of the mercies shown to him.

Focht was remanded to ComStar, where he was installed as the experienced commander the Com Guards lacked. As Precentor Martial, it fell to him to become ambassador to the Clans in 3050, and to ultimately face them on the fields of war at Tukayyid. Focht devised a successful strategy that defeated the Clans in spectacular fashion, and earned the Inner Sphere fifteen precious years to recover. Knowing that this victory was only temporary, Focht dedicated himself to the Clan threat. This hyper-focus led him to commit his biggest blunder: ignoring the Word of Blake when they seized Terra in 3058. Focht saw them as the lesser evil, to be dealt with after the Clans, though he did draw up plans such as Case White to eventually root them out.

The Whitting Conference presented an opportunity to do more than rearm and train. Focht helped restore the Star League, and wielding the might of a united Inner Sphere, brought the hammer down on Clan Smoke Jaguar. With the success of Operation Bulldog and the Great Refusal, Focht felt that he had at last paid off his debt to Theodore Kurita. They met privately at the Second Whitting Conference, after which Theodore presented Focht with the Order of the Dragon, the Combine's highest honor.

Believing his duty was concluded, Focht retired to the monastery on Dromini VI to write his memoirs, but a hero's enemies will never let him rest. The Word of Blake Jihad struck Focht particularly hard. His memoirs reveal a man riddled with guilt, even as he shunted it aside in favor of action. He rescued Primus Mori from the Blakist blockade of Tukayyid. His communiques with the likes of Marthe Pryde and Bjorn Jorgensson eventually helped bring the Clans into the war as allies. And his support of Devlin Stone led to the final defeat of the Blakists. Focht died a weary but content man shortly after the founding of the Republic, having made a more profound contribution to the human race than almost any other man of his time.

AS7-K ATLAS

HEIMDALL

POWER PLANT VLAR 300 XL

COMM SYSTEM SIPHER SECURITY PLUS

T&T SYSTEM MATABUSHI SENTINEL

ARMOR DURALLEX SPECIAL HEAVY
WITH CASE

MASS 100 TONS

CHASSIS FOUNDATION TYPE 10X

ARMAMENT 1 DRAGON'S FIRE GAUSS RIFLE

1 SHIGUNGA LRM-20 RACK

2 VICTORY NICKEL ALLOY

EXTENDED-RANGE LARGE LASERS

2 VICTORY HEARTBEAT MEDIUM PULSE LASERS

1 YORI FLYSWATTER ANTI-MISSILE SYSTEM

CRUISING SPEED 32 KPH

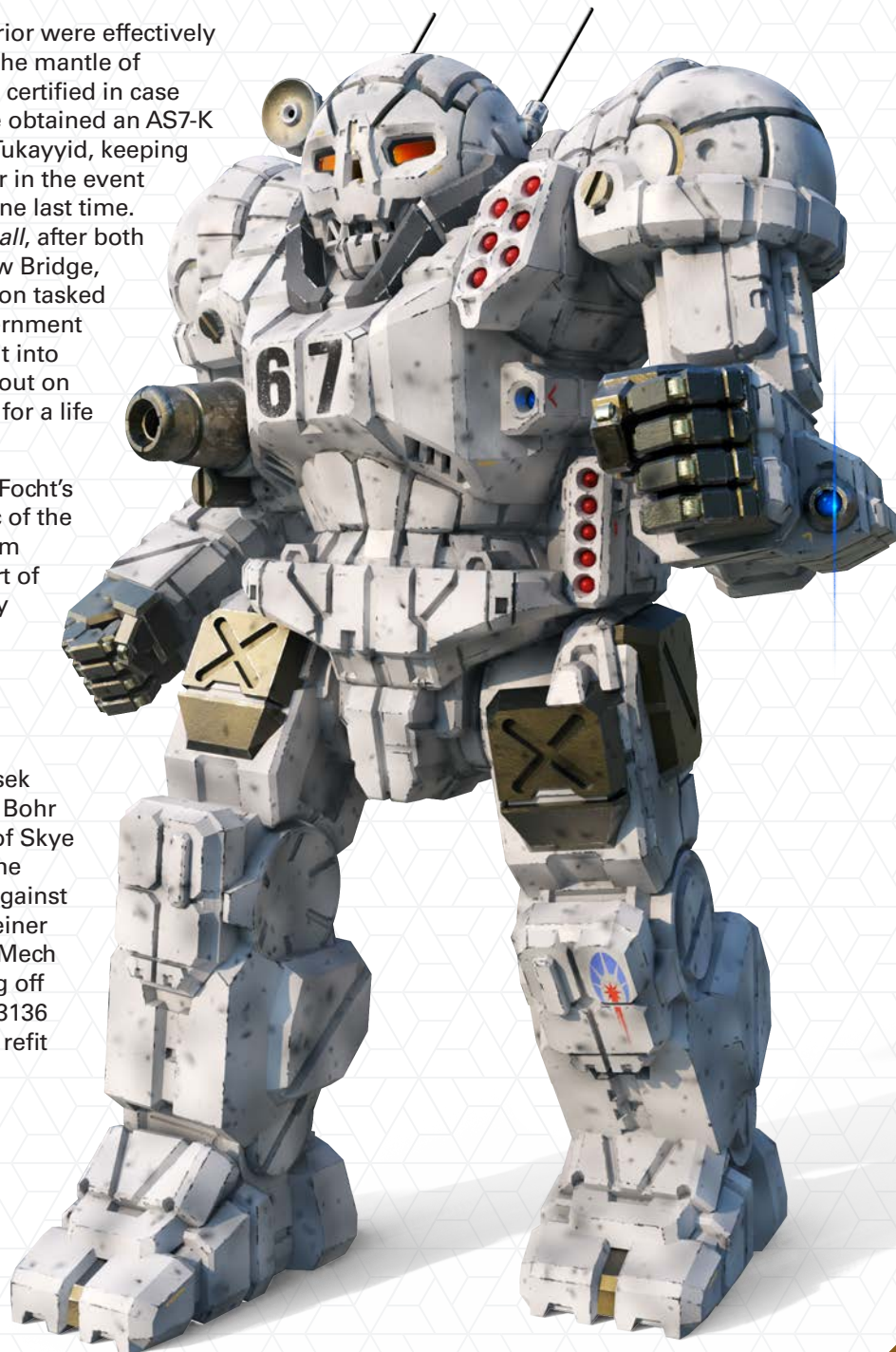
MAXIMUM SPEED 54 KPH

JUMP JETS NONE

JUMP CAPACITY NONE

Though his days as a MechWarrior were effectively over by the time he assumed the mantle of Precentor Martial, Focht remained certified in case the call of battle ever sounded. He obtained an AS7-K *Atlas* shortly before the Battle of Tukayyid, keeping it prepped in his command bunker in the event he had to lead troops into battle one last time. Focht dubbed the machine *Heimdall*, after both the Norse guardian of the Rainbow Bridge, and the shadowy Lyran organization tasked with curbing the excesses of government overreach. Though he never rode it into battle, Focht often took the 'Mech out on exercises, mostly out of nostalgia for a life long past.

After the conclusion of the Jihad, Focht's *Atlas* was donated to the Republic of the Sphere along with most of the Com Guards' equipment. It became part of the IX Principes Guards, piloted by former Demi-Precentor Denise LaShawn until her retirement in 3102. Following the Blackout and the rise of Lyran nationalism in Prefecture IX, Captain Jurgen Bohr took *Heimdall* to serve in Jasek Kelswa-Steiner's Stormhammers. Bohr participated in the allied defense of Skye from the Jade Falcons, but even the mighty *Atlas* proved inadequate against such a foe. Bohr urged Kelswa-Steiner to upgrade the storied but aging 'Mech to match the latest models coming off Hesperus' assembly lines, and in 3136 *Heimdall* underwent an extensive refit to modern standards.



ANASTASIUS FOCHT



POSITION/RANK

TAI-SA (DCMS)

AFFILIATION/UNIT

DRACONIS COMBINE

BIRTH YEAR

3021

There is no greater example of the rewards—or curses—of loyalty than that of Shin Yodama. Orphaned on Marfik during the Fourth Succession War, young Shin was adopted by the *Kuroi Kiri* yakuza clan and given missions no child should have to bear. Stuffed into a cockpit at a very young age, Shin proved himself more competent than many seasoned warriors, and when Theodore Kurita made his deal with the yakuza to supply troops to bolster the flagging DCMS, Shin was one of the first so honored.

Assigned to the Fourth Ghost in the War of 3039, Shin fought on Dobson and New Ivaarsen, where he lost the *Panther* he had piloted since the Ronin War. Shin was able to evade capture and sneak into a New Ivaarsen Chasseurs field base, where he used his hard-earned street skills to steal a *Phoenix Hawk*. One of only a handful of survivors of the Fourth Ghost, Shin received high praise for his actions even among the traditionalist DCMS officers.

By 3050, Shin commanded enough respect to be assigned to the Fourteenth Legion of Vega to serve with the Hohiro Kurita, grandson of the Coordinator. Their assignment to Turtle Bay was to be a quiet one, until the Clan Invasion redrew the front lines of war in the Inner Sphere. Hohiro was captured and imprisoned by the Smoke Jaguars, who knew not the prize they'd won. Shin engineered Hohiro's escape, and in retaliation the Jaguars razed the city of Edo from orbit. Horrified by such a brutal overreaction, Shin pledged to destroy this savage enemy at any cost.

When Clans Smoke Jaguar and Nova Cat came to cut the head off of the Dragon at the Battle of Luthien, Shin found himself with the least enviable job on the planet. It fell to him to rein in Takashi Kurita, the Coordinator himself, and ensure the safety of the Imperial City and of Omi Kurita, the Coordinator's granddaughter. Impressed by Shin's commitment and skill, Takashi offered him command of his personal bodyguard unit, the Dragon's Claws, renamed the Izanagi Warriors after the Battle of Luthien. Shin spent many hours in conference with the Dragon, bonding with him in a way Takashi never had with his own son, Theodore. Takashi's journals reveal that Shin helped him to better understand Theodore, and trust his estranged son to lead the Combine into a future that required more flexibility than Takashi could muster.

Shin's greatest bane was the *Kokuryu-Kai*, the society of hardliners who hated Theodore's reforms and exercised enormous power within the shadows of the DCMS and Combine government. Their poisonous words sounded sweet in the ears of those who longed for the Combine's golden era, including some among the Izanagi Warriors. Shin ruthlessly purged the Izanagi more than once, including demanding *seppuku* from his own second-in-command after uncovering the man's Black Dragon sympathies.

Shin protected three Coordinators during his time with the Izanagi, but suffered the pain of failure each time. Takashi Kurita repelled an assassination attempt before his untimely death, during which Shin and the Izanagi had been distracted. No amount of vigilance or combat prowess could have protected Theodore from a stroke, and Hohiro was captured and tortured by the Word of Blake. None of this was held against Shin, becoming instead an illustration of how difficult a job protecting the Coordinator is, and a reflection of the quality of man responsible for taking up the responsibility. Shin Yodama died tragically in 3073, a victim of the infamous Donner Bombing. The loss of his old friend hardened Hohiro's determination to support Devlin Stone and purge the Blakist stain from the Inner Sphere. Today, the Yodama gardens on Luthien, maintained by Shin's granddaughter, welcome war-weary soldiers and artists alike.

PHX-3M PHOENIX HAWK [MODIFIED]

KUROI KIRI

POWER PLANT	GM 270 XL	MASS	45 TONS	CRUISING SPEED	64 KPH
COMM SYSTEM	ACHERNAR ELECTRONICS HID-8	CHASSIS	ALSHAIN CLASS 580C ENDO STEEL	MAXIMUM SPEED	97 KPH
T&T SYSTEM	FEDERATED HUNTER	ARMAMENT	1 LORD'S LIGHT PPC 1 VICTORY NICKEL ALLOY EXTENDED-RANGE LARGE LASER 2 CHISCOMP 39 MEDIUM LASERS 1 GM MINIGUN 1 YORI FLYSWATTER AMS	JUMP JETS	RAWLINGS 80
ARMOR	DURALLEX LIGHT WITH CASE			JUMP CAPACITY	180 METERS

The *Phoenix Hawk* which Shin liberated from its Davion owners on New Ivaarsen served him well through the next few decades, though it did seem to retain a memory of its previous masters.

The sheer Davionness of the machine never really left it. Some MechWarriors claimed that rather than marching in proper Kurita fashion, the 'Mech walked with a swagger, and the distinct sound of spurs rattling on each step.

The braver ones even called out Shin for showboating, a foolishness they soon regretted.

Takashi Kurita insisted that Shin upgrade his 'Mech upon his promotion to command the Izanagi Warriors. The master technicians at Luthien Armor Works rebuilt Shin's 'Mech in a way that would have been impossible a decade earlier, adding a new Endo Steel frame and XL Engine. The weapons suite mirrored a PHX-3M, with the exception of replacing one laser with a powerful PPC. Though Shin was happy with the upgrades, a rebuilt BattleMech will always have its own problems. Due to gremlins, or even political reasons, Shin was known to pilot other 'Mechs, such as the *Dragon Fire* he used throughout Operation Bulldog.

Kuroi Kiri remains in service to the Izanagi Warriors in the thirty-second century. Piloting it is a rotating honor given out at the end of each year to the warrior who shows the greatest dedication to the Dragon. *Chu-i* Waylon Nakamura currently holds the honor, having sacrificed an eye stopping a suspected Federated Suns agent from assassinating Yori Kurita.



THE CIVIL

CHOOSER OF THE S

VICTOR STEINER - DAVION

DIRE

KATHERINE STEINER - DAVION

GALEN COX

CRD

WAR ERA

PLAIN

WOLF [CUSTOM] | PROMETHEUS

WARHAWK [C] | ICE QUEEN

- 5M CRUSADER | STORMCLOUD

SIR PAUL MASTERS

ARIS SUNG

TANCRED SANDOVAL

PXH - 1 PHOENIX HAWK [MODIFIED] | ROC

STG - 3R STINGER | FU SHEN

NSR - 9J NIGHTSTAR | ÉPÉE



CHOOSEER OF THE SLAIN

STEVEN MOHAN, JR.

Operation valkyrie. The code name given to the 20 July plot to assassinate German Führer Adolf Hitler. The valkyries—Odin’s handmaidens—were charged with deciding who on the battlefield would live—and who would die. The word is derived from the Old Norse Valkyrja which means “Chooser of the slain.”

—From the noteputer of Major Ingrid Amsel

FEDERATED-BOEING INTERSTELLAR, DROPSHIP FACILITY

AUBURN CITY

GALAX, FEDERATED COMMONWEALTH

18 JUNE 3062

Major Ingrid Amsel stood on the catwalk overlooking the factory floor, her posture as predatory as a raptor’s. She leaned forward, hands gripping the railing, her jaw mainspring tight.

Ingrid had been appointed commander of Federated-Boeing’s BattleMech detachment because she was a Steiner loyalist.

Because she was *trusted*.

The fact the Diplomatic Guard even allowed her up on this catwalk was a *measure* of that trust.

Something filthy and unwholesome turned over in her gut.

The cavernous factory’s ugly, jaundiced light resulted from its enormous overhead lights, their glow filtered through years of weld smoke and grinder dust. The greasy air smelled of ozone and *tasted* gritty. A half-built *Union* sat on the plant’s reinforced-concrete floor, its unarmored skin a bright metallic green. Workers

in blue coveralls tested rainbow-hued wire harnesses with multimeters.

A gaggle of dignitaries ambled past the DropShip, trying to look interested.

Ingrid’s dark eyes locked on one person.

A woman.

Surprisingly, the woman wasn’t wearing white. Instead, she wore the dress uniform of a Davion field marshal: a white uniform blouse with gold braid, blue trousers with blood-red stripes, and a flowing black cape.

This woman was not a soldier—not like her brother. *Nein*, the woman was a politician. And wearing the uniform was a politician’s move.

It was a way to broadcast her solidarity with the Federated Suns.

This was a woman who never missed a political angle.

Even her *name* was an angle.

Lately, Ingrid had been thinking about Field Marshal Erwin Rommel—the Desert Fox. Rommel was the best German battlefield commander of World War II, but he eventually turned against Hitler—and was implicated in a plot to kill the *Führer*.

Why?

Surely Rommel had never lost his love of the German culture, the German language, the German *people*. So why had he decided to assassinate the German leader?

Maybe Rommel had concluded that loving Germany wasn’t the same thing as loving Hitler.

Maybe loving Germany *required* killing Hitler.

And what did that say about Ingrid's responsibility to the Lyrans Commonwealth? Or, no. The Lyrans *Alliance*.

"Major," said a man's low, gravelly voice.

Major, she thought bitterly. Galax was a Davion world, and so Boeing used the old AFFS ranks for their private security force. *I used to be a kommandant*, she thought bleakly.

I used to be an officer of the Commonwealth.

She looked at Captain Erwin Bräuer, an old, weathered man who piloted a *Devastator*. Bräuer's goatee was coal-black, and he shaved his head bald. He wore three earrings in his left ear and he had a fleshy nose. He was an ugly old cuss. But he was good—very good—in a 'Mech cockpit.

Ingrid hesitated. There was something about him that was too...*still*. He *seemed* to be a regular man who loved drinking and whoring and clomping around in a 100-ton engine of destruction. Hell, she loved those things, too. But underneath all that there was a part of him that was watchful. Considering.

Still.

She just didn't know if she could trust him.

He handed her a folded piece of paper. She quickly read the six terse sentences handwritten in German. Her head jerked up.

Ja, Bräuer was still.

But his black eyes *burned*.

"*Ist das wahr?*" she asked in a hushed voice freighted with tension.

Is this true?

He nodded.

The note revealed the woman's plan to deal with her opposition on Galax. It seemed Bräuer really *did* have a contact on her staff.

The plans were horrific.

Monstrous.

"She has to be stopped," Ingrid croaked.

But how?

And by whom?

Surely not *Ingrid*.

Bräuer shook his head, doubt cut into the lines of his homely face.

"*Nein*, kommandant. We are small people. Too small to change history's course."

Fury swelled in Ingrid.

I am not small, she thought angrily.

Even though she had been thinking the exact opposite not twenty seconds earlier.

After a moment, Ingrid asked, "Does your contact have access to her schedule?"

EN ROUTE TO THE DROPSHIP *ARCHON PRINCESS*

NORTH OF AUBURN CITY

GALAX, FEDERATED COMMONWEALTH

18 JUNE 3062

The armored limo glided over faded gray asphalt, its mirror-bright black paint job gleaming in the afternoon sun. The vehicle was one of two identical cars, its position in the convoy determined by a roll of the dice. Today it was second in the limo order.

Tomorrow it might be first.

There was no way an enemy could predict which vehicle held the prize.

And the limos were flanked by APCs carrying armored infantry, the whole formation guarded by a lance of light, fast BattleMechs.

Katrina Steiner-Davion was well protected.

The Archon Princess watched the sere brown landscape rush by at ninety kph, a blur of fractured granite cliffs on her right, and fields of desiccated wild grass on her left.

She *hated* this grubby little world.

"Did the Duke agree to your terms, Highness?" asked Dehaver, stiffly formal as always.

She glanced at her intelligence adviser. Richard Dehaver was a tall, lean man with narrow shoulders. His face might have been handsome, if it hadn't been so pale—and drawn. And his eyes.

The eyes were dark—and *sunken*.

There was something...*unnatural*...about those eyes.

She missed Tormano.

Tormano would have told her what he thought. He wouldn't have been so formal.

And she could have read *his* eyes.

"Not yet," she said, unable to keep the bitterness out of her voice. "McCorkendale is an old fool. But he'll rethink his position when hunger starts to take a bite out of the people."

Katrina glanced back and saw a Coventry-built *Commando* in the blue and gold paint scheme of the First Royal Guards. Trailing the COM-2D was a *Stinger*. The 'Mechs were guarding her rear. Another two machines—a *Locust* and *Hussar*—ran ahead to clear the way.

The parched earth trembled with their footsteps.

"The Archon's Own," was the unit's motto.

You had better be, she thought grimly. *You better be.*

"Shall I start delaying grain shipments to the planet, Highness?" asked Dehaver.

Civil war was sweeping down on the Federated Commonwealth. Katrina could feel it. *Everyone* could feel it. All one had to do was see a fistfight between men on the street or hear the ugly mutterings of a crowd. When Katrina went to her people, she expected to be greeted by little girls holding bouquets. Instead, she saw anger lurking in the eyes of her subjects. Sometimes their faces were sullen.

Sometimes they were *savage*.

"Yes—but carefully. Be subtle. A missed shipment here and there. JumpShip maintenance problems. Radiation leaks. Torn jump sails. Nothing that can be tied back to me."

Galax was her realm's leading producers of DropShips and JumpShips. If war *did* come, she needed this world to support *her*.

Not Victor.

"*Jawohl, Highness.*"

People would starve, their bellies sunken, ribs visible beneath sagging skin. People would die. *Children* would die. More if McCorkendale was stubborn. Fewer if he saw reason.

But she *would* have Galax.

She felt the limo turn right onto a dirt road that followed a narrow passage cut through the granite rock face.

Her official schedule said that after touring the Federated-Boeing factory, she would check in to the Hotel de Malabar—but her official schedule was a lie. Let assassins look for her along the M4 ringing Auburn City or in the hotel's First Prince's Suite.

She would be elsewhere.

Katrina was always one step ahead of everyone.

Which was why she *would* beat Victor.

As the car completed its turn, a new 'Mech—this one a *Valkyrie* painted in gleaming Federated-Boeing white—sprinted toward her rearguard. The blue Boeing logo was painted over the machine's right chest.

The *Commando* turned, its pilot's confusion echoed in the machine's posture.

The *Valkyrie* raised its right arm and poured emerald fire into the *Commando's* cockpit.

Headshot.

A thick column of greasy black smoke poured out of the COM-2D's shattered canopy.

Its pilot would never be confused by anything again.

The Guards machine *slammed* into the earth.

The *Valkyrie* turned to face the *Stinger*, launching a flight of LRMs.

The concussion of detonations rippled through the air.

Then *another* Federated-Boeing machine appeared, an *Assassin*.

The medium left the *Stinger* to the *Valkyrie* and charged after the fleeing limo.

Dehaver was shouting into his comm. "All units guarding this frequency, this is Charlie Tango Six! BROKEN CROWN! I say again, I have a BROKEN CROWN! WHITE GOLD is at my posit! Send all available forces! Out!"

Katrina was more succinct. She leaned forward and pounded a fist on the partition separating her from the driver, the doctor, and the guards. "Go," she shouted. "*GO!*"

The driver didn't have to be told twice. Suddenly the limo was *flying* up the road, trailing a rooster tail of dirt.

The *Assassin* sprinted after them, closing the gap.

It occurred to Katrina that maybe she wasn't a step ahead of everyone, after all.



The limousine disappeared into the cut in the rock face. Ingrid's heart throbbed in her chest.

Katrina was getting away.

This was a woman who would use hunger as a weapon. Who would drag the realm down into the hell of civil war.

She had to be stopped.

Ingrid didn't care who ruled the Federated Commonwealth. Peter. Arthur. Yvonne.

Even Victor.

She just knew it *couldn't* be Katrina.

Ingrid charged into the passage. The cut was only seven meters across and shaded by lodgepole pines and scrub oaks growing out of the crumbling rock.

The limo disappeared around a bend.

Ingrid would have charged after the luxury car, but an armored personnel carrier parked sideways blocked her path.

Soldiers in Infiltrator Mk II suits boiled out of the APC. The battlesuits were blocky things loaded with armor plates. The goggle-eyed helmets with the ribbed rubber hoses emerging from the snout made the soldiers look like armored elephants.

The Infiltrators turned Ingrid's stomach.

These weren't Katrina's henchmen.

These were soldiers of the Lyran military doing their duty.

They didn't deserve to die.

And Katrina had deployed them even though they had little chance against Ingrid's *Assassin*. Katrina had spent the lives of these brave soldiers for one reason, and one reason only.

To slow Ingrid down.

She gritted her teeth and speared one of the Infiltrators with her medium laser, emerald fire engulfing the helpless soldier. She punched a pair of SRMs into a second one, blowing it apart. She kicked a third trooper, sending them flying eight meters. *That* soldier would have broken bones.

But maybe they'd live.

Ingrid could hope.

The rest of the Infiltrator squad was pouring Gauss slugs into her frame, denting and cracking armor.

Almost none of them were hitting her from cover. It would be the work of mere moments to crush these marauding troops under the footfalls of a forty-ton BattleMech.

But she had not come to murder Katrina's pawns.

She slammed her boots down on her pedals and the *Assassin's* jump jets carried it over the APC. She feathered her jets, coming down in a crouch, the impact hard enough to slam through her legs and pelvis and spine all the way up into her skull.

Her teeth *clacked* shut on impact.

She ignored the fire coming from the Infiltrators and charged up the road.

It split into a pair of dirt roads cutting through the forest at the hill's top.

Where had Katrina gone?

There were signs of traffic on *both* roads. She listened hard to her external mic, trying to pick up the sound of Katrina's convoy.

Left.

There, the faint rumble of motors.

Coming from the left fork.

She raced left.

Was she hearing a car *behind* her? Fear that she had made the wrong choice turned her bowels to water.

Then—through the trees—*movement*.

A gleaming black limousine.

Ingrid pushed her control sticks forward. She couldn't jump—not with the turning, twisting road. And she couldn't hit the *Assassin's* flank speed—not with the road snaking up a crumbling hillside.

But she did get *some* speed.

And Katrina's convoy was facing the same problem with the serpentine road. The limousines were too big to turn on a dime.

Slowly, meter by meter, Ingrid reeled the convoy in.

She dropped her reticule over the fleeing limo and pulled into her triggers. Emerald fire sliced through

lodgepole pines and aspens, cutting through the trunks and lighting the crowns on fire.

Enough laser fire got through the forest to burn away black paint over the car's trunk and turn the rear window's smoked glass into bubbling slag. Ingrid had hoped to cut apart one of the limo's steel-belted tires, but her aim had been too high.

Nevertheless, with the damage she had done to the forest, she had a clear shot.

She fired her SRMs. A pair of missiles slashed towards the limo trailing plumes of fire.

For a heartbeat Ingrid held her breath.

Then an ugly base concussion rolled through the forest and the limo rose on a orange column of fire. The car flipped over and smashed into the earth, most likely killing everyone inside.

Most likely wasn't good enough.

As she ran, she played laser fire across vehicle, melting armor, and cutting through into the interior.

She remembered the 20 July plot had narrowly missed killing Hitler—forcing the German people to endure eight more months of that wretched war, fighting and dying for nothing more noble than a madman's ego.

She would not make that mistake.

When she was satisfied that nothing living remained in the limo's smoking wreckage, she pushed her loping *Assassin* back into a run.

She had killed one limousine, but she did not know which of the vehicles carried Katrina Steiner-Davion.

She would have to get them both.

She turned a corner around an outcropping of trees and found Katrina's convoy: APCs, SUVs, and support vehicles.

But no second limo.

Suddenly Ingrid remembered that as she'd proceeded down the left fork, she'd thought she'd heard a car *behind* her.



The limousine skidded when it came to a washout, its tires stuttering through potholes. Katrina wanted to scream. She would have threatened the driver with a firing squad, except she didn't want him thinking about his imminent execution rather than trying

to get them *out of here*. Branches reached out and battered the fleeing vehicle, as if the forest itself were trying to kill her.

The bitter tang of flop sweat curdled in the limo. She could feel it sliding down her sides and pooling between her breasts. Her mouth tasted dry and metallic. She was wild with adrenaline, almost sick with it, her heart beating so hard it hurt. If the pursuing *Assassin* did not kill her, the *fear* of the pursuing *Assassin* would kill her.

It was then the limo caught on a deadfall. The vehicle's front tires rolled up and over the half-buried log, and then the car bottomed out. The limo rolled forward, making a wretched sound as the low-clearance vehicle scraped over the dead tree.

It made Katrina want to scream.

Then the rear tires hit the log.

And didn't go over.

The limo *stopped*.

Katrina's eyes widened.

One of Victor's agents was out there, trying to kill her. And her limo was *stopped*.

"We're stopped," said one of the guards.

Scheisse, Katrina thought. If she'd had a weapon, she would have shot the man.

"The front tires made it over," said the driver helplessly.

"We were going a lot faster when the front tires hit," observed Dehaver. "Put it in low gear, and we'll lift the back wheels over."

"You can't lift an armored limousine," snarled the driver.

"We'll use the jack to assist."

"It's *never* going to work."

"And sitting here on our asses isn't going to solve the problem either," Dehaver shot back.

Somehow the five men—aided by the jack—were able to lift the vehicle's rear end enough that the tires *just* made it over the half-buried log. Katrina felt the car advance and then come down on the rutted road, bouncing on its springs.

She set the parking brake and was instantly out of the front seat. She wanted to *go*.

Katrina raced toward the rear seat.

But Dehaver grabbed her arm.

She looked at that pale almost-handsome face, furious.

"Wait," he said.



Ingrid's *Assassin* tore through the forest. She felt time racing away with every frantic beat of her heart. She plowed into the boles of trees, smashing through branches, pine needles cascading over her BattleMech. Her *Assassin* ran like it was picking up her panic, twisting to the side with every blow, staggering forward, falling to one knee and then struggling to its feet.

None of it mattered.

All that mattered was *speed*.

All Ingrid could think of was the *almost*-success of the 20 July plot.

And Bräuer saying, "We are small people."

Ingrid wondered if she even would have launched this attack if he hadn't said that.

She *had* to find that second limo.

By now, the desperate call had gone out that Katrina was in trouble. Loyal forces would be converging from every point of the compass.

But the odds were still with Ingrid.

As long as Erwin Bräuer's *Devastator* held off the machines scouting ahead of the convoy.

She spotted a Karnov UR hovering over the dirt road. The bird was holding at twenty-five meters off the hard deck, as low as it could go without its rotor tips slicing into the treetops. Loki operatives in Steiner blue coveralls were rappelling out of the helo.

They were going to pull Katrina out by hand, fit her with a safety vest, and winch her up.

She was minutes away from rescue.

Ingrid reacted on instinct.

She dropped her reticule over the Karnov's port rotor set and pulled into her trigger.

LRMs streaked toward the VTOL.

And then the rotors were molten orange fireballs spitting shrapnel. The Karnov tumbled out of the sky.

And punched right into the limo.

Elation surged through Ingrid.

Then she remembered the outcome of the 20 July plot.

She would leave nothing to chance.

She worked her way south along the dirt road, looking for signs that Katrina had somehow escaped.



Katrina stumbled through the scrub oak and clumps of walking stick cactus that choked the forest floor. It was hard going, but she kept on.

The sound of distant explosions helped.

When she heard the clatter of rotors, she turned on Dehaver. "We should have gone with the limo," she snarled. "I'd be out by now, if I hadn't listened to you."

Dehaver said nothing. Apparently, he'd learned not to argue.

Then Katrina heard the ripple of missiles detonating—followed by the sound of something large falling out of the sky.

Okay, maybe he was right.

A mechanical giant pulled back the branches of a lodgepole pine and peered down at them.

The machine was painted in the white and blue colors of Federated-Boeing.

It was the *Assassin*.

It didn't matter what I did, thought Katrina. I was going to die either way.



Katrina!

Ingrid couldn't believe it. She had gotten both limos, but somehow she hadn't finished off Katrina Steiner-Davion. Well, she would make up for that error now.

She raised the *Assassin*'s right arm, aiming her laser at the Archon Princess and her aide—

Sudden laser fire drove her to her knees. She glanced down at her rearview display and saw a *Locust* and a *Hussar* both in Steiner blue, cutting into her vulnerable rear armor.

This was Katrina's forward guard. *What are they doing here?* Bräuer's *Devastator* should've taken them out—or at least slowed them down.

She was distracted for only a moment, but it was long enough for Katrina and her aide to disappear into the forest.

She would have to dispatch the two light machines and reacquire her target.

A glance at her rearview monitor showed the *Locust* stalking toward her on its backward-bent chicken legs, firing as it came. Her wireframe flashed yellow—then *red*. A spike of brutal heat told her the attack had damaged her heatsinks. The shrill cry of the heat alarm filled her cockpit. She overrode it, but the *Hussar* grabbed her left arm, wrenching her to the side.

She went down.

The *Assassin* slammed into the earth, and everything went bla—



Katrina stepped over to the 'Mech's shattered canopy. She was surprised to find she recognized the machine's pilot. She was from the Amsel family. Enid or Inga or something like that.

"You were supposed to be loyal," Katrina said.

"I *am* loyal," croaked the woman, "to the people of the Commonwealth."

Dehaver stepped in. "We need to get you clear, Highness," he said urgently. "There may be more assassins—"

She waved his words away. "There are no assassins here, *Herr* Dehaver."

He opened his mouth, but she talked right over him. "This was a daring raid by bandits hoping to steal a Federated-Boeing data cache. The brave warriors from the company spoiled the attack." She glanced down at Enid or Inga Amsel. "Tragically, all the heroes died of their wounds."

The woman's eyes widened at *that*.

"I was nowhere near the incident," said Katrina.

"But—" he began.

"If it becomes known my own people tried to kill me, it will make me look weak. This is how it *has* to be."

"How will we sell it?"

She flashed him a tight smile. "For starters, I still have a reservation at the Hotel de Malabar. When I speak to the people of Galax, I'll speak from there." She shook her head. "No one will ever know."



A contingent of Loki officers found and dispatched the surviving members of Ingrid Amsel's cabal. They got all but one. The *Devastator* was found abandoned, its pilot vanished.

No one ever saw Erwin Bräuer again.

IBARAKI

LUTHIEN, DRACONIS COMBINE

23 AUGUST 3062

The quaint little house was located in the sleepy seaside village of Ibaraki, and was surrounded by an ocean of nemophilas. Victor Steiner-Davion watched the thousands of gorgeous blue flowers gently sway in the mild summer breeze. Omi, dressed in a yellow kimono, moved among the flowers like the sun passing across the sky.

Victor wanted to be down there with her.

He hated to interrupt his three-day vacation, but Galen had just returned from his mission via multiple command circuits, and Victor wanted to speak with him.

There was a rap at the wooden frame of the rice-paper door and a man stepped out onto the wooden deck. It was Galen Cox, aka Jerry Cranston.

Aka Erwin Bräuer.

"I trust your journey was well," said Victor.

There were three holes in the man's ear, but the nose prosthetic and the goatee were gone. He had pulled off the delicate polymer mask that had made his face look wrinkled and aged.

"It was *long*, but the extra JumpShips helped. Thank you for that."

There was a moment of uncomfortable silence.

"You don't seem happy, Highness."

"You were supposed to make contact with your source on Katherine's staff," said Victor grimly, "not stage an assassination attempt against my sister."

"It wasn't me," said Cox. "It was Ingrid Amsel. I wasn't able to pull her back."

Victor didn't know whether to believe him or not. He trusted absolutely in the man's loyalty.

But they had argued about the possibility of eliminating Katherine before.

"Assassination is a dirty tool," murmured Victor, thinking of his mother.

Cox said nothing.

Victor pushed out an irritated sigh. "Speak."

"I know you'd never kill Katherine to secure your rule," said Cox. "But could you kill her to save the lives of loyal citizens of the Federated Commonwealth?"

Victor didn't answer. He didn't *have* an answer.

Could I do something reprehensible—be something reprehensible—if it prevents a civil war that will cost the lives of millions?

Not yet. It was the best answer he could come up with. *Not yet.*

After a long moment of silence, Cox bowed his head. "Please forgive the interruption, Highness. I will give you a full report when you return to work."

He left.

Victor turned to look at the field of blue flowers.

He wondered if Cox really had tried to prevent the attempt on Katherine's life.

Or if he had facilitated it.

Victor thought Cox and the men and women like him were the true valkyries. It was the operatives working in the shadows who truly chose who was slain.

Wanting to leave the subject of political murder behind, he sought a subject of beauty and peace, and his gaze found his beloved Omi in her simple yellow kimono.

He watched her a long time, glad to be no longer burdened by thoughts of assassination.





POSITION/RANK	ARCHON-PRINCE; PRECENTOR MARTIAL (COM GUARDS); PALADIN (REPUBLIC OF THE SPHERE)
AFFILIATION/UNIT	FEDERATED COMMONWEALTH; COMSTAR; REPUBLIC OF THE SPHERE
BIRTH YEAR	3030

Eldest of the Steiner-Davion offspring and heir to the mighty Federated Commonwealth, Victor entered adulthood uncomfortable with politics and keenly aware that he had done nothing to earn the titles, ranks, and honors bestowed upon him by his birthright. Determined to prove his worth on his own merits, his drive often manifested as acting without thinking or throwing a temper tantrum.

The shock of the Clan invasion helped the young nobleman rapidly mature, as he learned from defeats on Trelwan and Alyina to win hard-fought victories on Twycross and Teniente, and emerged as one of the great heroes of the conflict. Not only had he bested the Clans in battle, but he developed strong bonds with other noble leaders, including Omiko and Hohiro Kurita—scions of his House's deadliest rival, helping to bind the fractured Inner Sphere together to present a united front.

The deaths of Victor's parents thrust him into an unwanted position of political power, his every

decision affecting the fates of billions of subjects. Unprepared for such responsibility, Victor relied on his politically adept sister, Katherine, for guidance and support—unaware that it was she who had arranged the assassination of their mother.

As Victor struggled to protect his realm, he was betrayed by Katherine, who used the authority with which Victor had entrusted her to secede the Lyran Alliance from the Federated Commonwealth. Still loyal to the Lyran people, Victor led a multinational task force to repulse a Jade Falcon invasion in 3058. At the subsequent Whitting Conference, he was instrumental in the formation of the Second Star League, and in planning its campaign to end the threat of the Clans. On Strana Mechty, he triumphed in the Great Refusal, beheading ilKhan Lincoln Osis with a katana gifted to him by his paramour, Omiko.

Returning to the Inner Sphere, however, the triumphant Conqueror of the Clans found that Katherine had manipulated their sister Yvonne into abandoning her regency of New Avalon, allowing Katherine to bring the sundered halves of the Federated Commonwealth under her rule. Stateless, Victor was granted refuge in the Draconis Combine and, in 3061, succeeded Anastasius Focht as Precentor Martial of ComStar.

Though billions of his former subjects cried out for his return to liberate them from Katherine's oppression, he was unwilling to unleash the horror of a civil war until open fighting broke out in 3062, followed by the assassination of his brother Arthur. Blaming Katherine, Victor called upon his friends for support, and the allied coalition fought Katherine's loyalists across the breadth of the Commonwealth for five long and bloody years, punctuated by Katherine's assassination of Omiko as a means of striking at Victor's very heart.

Never having wanted the throne in the first place, after Katherine's surrender and exile Victor signed the 3067 Act of Succession, permanently removing himself, Katherine and their heirs from any claim to the title of Archon or First Prince. He returned to ComStar, but the outbreak of the Jihad shattered his adopted home. Reeling from The Master's Sphere-wide assault, Victor again rallied his friends and joined efforts with Devlin Stone to crush the Blakist menace.

After decades of destruction, Victor wanted to create a better universe for his children—Jade, Burton, and Lee. He unexpectedly found himself serving the Republic of the Sphere alongside one more of his offspring, Sir Kitsune, who revealed he was Victor's secret son by Omiko. As a Paladin, Victor dedicated himself to creating and preserving the Pax Republica.

Victor fell to assassins dispatched by disloyal Senators in 3134 while investigating their conspiracy against the Republic.

DIRE WOLF [CUSTOM]

POWER PLANT	STARFIRE 300 XL
COMM SYSTEM	TJ6 "BELL" INTEGRATED COMMUNICATION SYSTEM
T&T SYSTEM	MARS SYSTEM 9
ARMOR	COMPOUND 12B2 STANDARD

MASS	100 TONS
CHASSIS	TITAN HX
ARMAMENT	2 SERIES 6B EXTENDED-RANGE LARGE LASERS
	3 KOLIBRI DELTA SERIES LARGE PULSE LASERS
	1 DEVASTATOR ULTRA 20 AUTOCANNON
	1 MK. 22 TYPE III SRM-6 LAUNCHER

PROMETHEUS

CRUISING SPEED	32 KPH
MAXIMUM SPEED	54 KPH
JUMP JETS	NONE
JUMP CAPACITY	NONE

At the 3051 Outreach Summit, the assembled young Nobles battled a cadre of legendary MechWarriors in a ranked combat exercise, with Victor and Hohiro Kurita each receiving a Wolf's Dragoons-made *Daishi* (*Dire Wolf*) and a wide array of weapons pods to configure them as they pleased. Victor initially opted for the Prime configuration, naming it *Prometheus* in honor of the mythic lightbringer due to its heavy laser arsenal.

On Alyina, however, Victor faced Jade Falcon warriors who were well accustomed to battling an OmniMech prevalent in the *touman* of their arch-rivals, Clan Wolf, and he barely escaped offworld. His Revenants refit on Port Moseby, allowing Victor to adopt the A configuration, swapping the autocannons, long range missiles and laser arsenal for a Gauss rifle and large pulse laser-centric loadout, backed by twin Streak missile launchers and an anti-missile system. This more durable and accurate configuration served him well in combat with the Nova Cats on Teniente. He retained this configuration throughout Operation Bulldog and in the Great Refusal on Strana Mechty.

When the Civil War broke out, Victor outfitted *Prometheus* in a unique configuration that paired a trio of Large Pulse Lasers with two ER Large Lasers, and relied on a Class-20 Ultra Autocannon and SRM 6 launcher to discourage up-close encounters, though he adopted the B configuration's classic autocannon and PPC mix when he faced Adam Steiner on Newtown Square's Plains of Culd in 3063.

In 3066, after a six-month overhaul, *Prometheus* emerged victorious on Tikonov, painted in blue and black, trimmed with gold, and restored to its pre-Newtown Square loadout. In 3067, *Prometheus* battered through Katherine's last lines of defense around her palace on New Avalon, bringing the Federated Commonwealth Civil War to a close.





POSITION/RANK	ARCHON-PRINCESS; MECHWARRIOR (CLAN WOLF)
AFFILIATION/UNIT	LYRAN ALLIANCE; CLAN WOLF
BIRTH YEAR	3032

The second child of Hanse Davion and Melissa Steiner-Davion, Katherine grew up in the media spotlight learning the fine art of politics and governance while her older brother, heir-apparent Victor, became a war hero battling the Clan invaders. Publicly backing her sibling as he assumed a prominent role in Inner Sphere politics, she covertly engaged in manipulations designed to remove him from her path to power.

She arranged for Melissa's death in 3055 while planting rumors implicating Victor. Accompanying Victor's friend Galen Cox on a subsequent tour of Lyran worlds, she made public appearances to bolster her image and scheduled meetings with local leaders as she methodically constructed an invisible power base. During the trip, she and Galen became romantically involved, but when she was warned of an imminent assassination attempt against him, she chose self-preservation—the only option her icy pragmatism would allow—and left him to his fate.

When Victor's scheme to replace Marik heir Joshua with a body double was exposed, triggering a

retaliatory attack by the boy's father, Katherine announced the secession of the Lyran half of the Federated Commonwealth, dubbing it the Lyran Alliance and proclaiming herself its Archon. By so doing, she crippled Victor's ability to respond to the attacks and cast him as a warmongering child abuser in the public eye, while she claimed the mantle of a peace-loving and benevolent guardian, styling herself "Katrina" in honor of her popularly venerated grandmother.

Katherine proved masterful at navigating the turbulent waters of Inner Sphere politics and built alliances of convenience in unexpected quarters. She also sought allies among the Clans, heading a mission to the Smoke Jaguar Occupation Zone to forge an alliance with ilKhan Lincoln Osis. Instead, when her ship encountered a Clan Wolf flotilla, she was able to make her offer to Khan Vlad Ward, with whom she found an immediate rapport.

Returning to Alliance space to find Coventry under attack from the Jade Falcons, she authorized a multi-national expeditionary force to liberate the vital industrial world, touching off a chain of events that led to the formation of the Second Star League and Victor's two-year campaign to the distant Clan Homeworlds, leaving Katherine's younger sister Yvonne as regent on New Avalon. It was a simple task for Katherine to manipulate both public opinion and her sister to convince her to abdicate her role, establishing Katherine as the Archon-Princess of the Federated Commonwealth.

Facing legal challenges and public outcry, Katherine filled the halls of power with her loyalists and blanketed the newsvids with propaganda. She gave Loki free rein to suppress protests and operate as secret police to ferret out those still loyal to Victor. Though she framed these measures as acting strongly to secure her realm, as an Archon should, the heavy-handed police-state repression and free license given to loyalist nobles to loot public resources for their personal gain fanned the flames of revolt. With pro-Victor rumors linking her to Melissa's death, the assassination of her brother Arthur in 3062 touched off a civil war between her loyalists and Victor's supporters that ravaged the Commonwealth until her surrender on New Avalon in 3067.

Claimed as *isorla* by Khan Vlad Ward, Katherine was released by her brother to avoid war with the Wolves. As Katherine Wolf, she worked with Vlad to develop the genetically experimental Ironborn *sibko*. Her most successful creation, Khan Alaric Ward, combined genes from Victor and Katherine herself; in official records, Alaric's genefather was said to be Vlad Ward. She guided Alaric's rise to power, but was slain by his hand on 31 August 3143, when he realized the danger her ambitions posed to his own.

WARHAWK [C]

POWER PLANT	GENERAL SYSTEMS 340 XL
COMM SYSTEM	SERIES 10 CBS MULTIFRE
T&T SYSTEM	HAWKEYE J360 WITH TARGETING COMPUTER
ARMOR	FORGING X85 FERRO-FIBROUS

MASS	85 TONS
CHASSIS	HUNTRESS WH
ARMAMENT	2 DELTA SERIES LARGE PULSE LASERS
	2 TYPE 22 EXTENDED-RANGE PPCS
	1 DUPONT ULTRA PM FLAMER

ICE QUEEN

CRUISING SPEED	43 KPH
MAXIMUM SPEED	64 KPH
JUMP JETS	NONE
JUMP CAPACITY	NONE

Always more of a politician than a warrior, Katherine never underwent even the rudimentary infantry training given to her mother, and certainly felt more at home making speeches than manning gunsights. After she exiled to Clan Wolf and was taken as bondswoman by Khan Vladimir Ward, the former Archon-Princess finally learned to pilot a BattleMech. To compensate for her lack of natural aptitude, she chose a *Warhawk* C as her ride, relying on its targeting computer and highly accurate pulse lasers.

Having fought multiple Trials defending himself against charges of favoritism, Vlad insisted Katherine earn her warrior status through a formal Trial of Position in 3073. Katherine faced warriors from the Sixth Wolf Garrison Cluster, which had recently escaped the wholesale genocide unfolding in the Clan Homeworlds.

As the trial began, her three opponents, per tradition, agreed to engage her sequentially. The first, MechWarrior Karin, stepped her *Ice Ferret* forward and broadcast a challenge, calling Katherine to battle. Katherine, in turn, scanned the warriors' formation, seeking weaknesses to exploit.

All her careful analysis went out the window as the computer identified the third foe's BattleMech as a ClanTech refit of an antiquated Star League Defense Force chassis that had served out its centuries of existence on garrison duty.

A VTR-9B...
Victor.

With a white-knuckled grip on her control stick, she ignored Karin's challenge and, in defiance of Clan protocol, targeted the trailing assault 'Mech instead. An alpha strike, guided by her targeting computer, intersected on the *Victor's* head, vaporizing the cockpit superstructure and the *solahma* MechWarrior inside. In the confusion of the moment, some reports which reached other Clans claimed it was the *Ice Ferret* that had challenged her that was destroyed.

Before the shocked witnesses could react, Katherine signaled her surrender and powered down, abruptly ending the trial. The newly anointed warrior of Clan Wolf proclaimed herself well satisfied with the outcome.





POSITION/RANK HAUPTMANN (ARMED FORCES OF THE FEDERATED COMMONWEALTH); PRINCE'S CHAMPION; ADJUTANT (COM GUARDS); GENERAL;

AFFILIATION/UNIT FEDERATED COMMONWEALTH; COMSTAR, ALLIED COALITION; REPUBLIC OF THE SPHERE

BIRTH YEAR 3020

Born on the border world of Alexandria, Galen helped his parents run their quillar farm and small repair shop, and the closest he ever imagined coming to royalty was spending an Archon-faced kroner coin. When Combine soldiers killed his family during the War of 3039, Galen joined the military to seek revenge. His natural aptitude as a MechWarrior gained him a scholarship to the War College of Tamar and a berth in the Twelfth Donegal Guards upon graduation in 3042.

He got his chance for revenge on House Kurita during raids targeting Ryde, but his bloodlust faded as he realized innocent civilians were dying on both sides, and that his job was not to lead a crusade to destroy the Draconis Combine, but to protect the people of the Federated Commonwealth.

When Archon-Prince Victor Steiner-Davion was assigned to the Twelfth on Trellewan straight out of the Nagelring, Galen volunteered as his aide to guide the young kommandant and help him

reach his full potential. When the Clans attacked, Galen had to knock Victor out to get him aboard an evacuation ship. Victor refused Galen's resignation for striking him, realizing that his aide had been acting in his best interests and those of the Commonwealth, and the two developed an inseparable friendship as they battled the Clans on Twycross, Alyina and Teniente. Galen accompanied Victor to the Outreach summit, holding his own among the young nobles gathered there.

After the assassination of Archon Melissa Steiner-Davion, Galen escorted Victor's sister Katherine to Salome Ward's funeral on Arc-Royal, and the two were romantically linked in the scandaloids. His status as a Skye-district native, war hero, and associate of the ruling dynasty led Ryan Steiner to consider Galen a potential rival for influence over the burgeoning Skye secessionist movement. After Galen defeated Ryan's champions in a duel on Solaris VII, Ryan ordered his assassination. Warned by FedCom intelligence (though not by Katherine, who had been tipped off by Ryan), Galen faked his own death and assumed the identity of Jerrard Cranston, Victor's National Security Advisor, a native of Callison who had fought the Clans with the First Lyran Guards on Maestu.

As Cranston, he disagreed with Victor's Operation Gemini plan to preserve leverage over House Marik by concealing Joshua Marik's death from cancer, but carried it out nonetheless. Ever at Victor's side, he helped coordinate responses to the surprise Marik-Liao attacks and the secession of the Lyran Alliance, and accompanied Victor to both Coventry and Strana Mechty. When civil war broke out between pro-Victor and pro-Katherine forces, Galen oversaw the often dirty but vital cloak-and-dagger network (including an unsuccessful assassination attempt on Katherine), allowing Victor to keep his hands clean and his focus on the military situation.

His intelligence operations revealed not only that Katherine was linked to the murders of both Melissa Steiner-Davion and Victor's lover Omiko Kurita, but also that Captain-General Thomas Marik was an impostor. He coordinated with the grieving House Kurita to track Katherine's hired assassin, the notorious Dancing Joker, and returned to Victor with evidence of the death of his mother's murderer and data suggesting Omiko had been pregnant with Victor's child.

Galen stayed by Victor's side throughout the Jihad, coordinating anti-Blakist efforts and leading Com Guard forces into battle as part of Devlin Stone's coalition. Promoted to general in the run-up to the liberation of Terra, his task force neutralized Blakist command centers in North America's desert southwest. In Stone's Republic of the Sphere, he served as Director of the Sphere Intelligence Service, coordinating data analysis, espionage and counter-intelligence from its Geneva headquarters—doing his part to bring Stone's Pax Republica into being.

CRD-5M *CRUSADER*

STORMCLOUD

POWER PLANT	HERMES 260 XL	MASS	65 TONS	CRUISING SPEED	43 KPH
COMM SYSTEM	GARRET T11-B	CHASSIS	CRUCIS-B	MAXIMUM SPEED	64.8 KPH
T&T SYSTEM	GARRET A6	ARMAMENT	2 MAGNA LONGBOW-15 LRM LAUNCHERS	JUMP JETS	CHILTON 465
ARMOR	RIESE-500 WITH CASE		2 HOVERTEC STREAK SRM-2 PODS	JUMP CAPACITY	120 METERS
			2 INTEK MEDIUM LASERS		
			1 LINDBLAD SHOTGUN ANTI-MISSILE SYSTEM		
			1 M100 MACHINE GUN		

In the Twelfth Donegal Guards, Galen piloted a centuries-old CRD-3R *Crusader* he named *Stormcloud* for its ability to rain destruction from afar. The antiquated machine proved its power when Galen engaged (and provided the name for) a Jade Falcon *Thor* (Summoner) in the caverns of Thunder Rift.

On Twycross, Galen's *Crusader* served as Victor's bodyguard, battling Falcons hand-to-hand in the swirling sandstorms on the Plain of Curtains. At the cliffs of Mar Negro on Alyina, Galen again defended Victor as Storm Company battled through a Jade Falcon ambush. Refusing Victor's order to withdraw, he held the Clan forces back until reinforcements arrived.

On Port Moseby, *Stormcloud* was upgraded with House Marik-produced equipment to a CRD-5M configuration, benefiting from the anti-Clan alliance with greater mobility and durability. These proved essential when Galen and Victor's Revenants fought Nova Cat forces on Teniente during a mission to rescue Hohiro Kurita, shattering Clan garrison forces with pinpoint missile barrages. Upon Victor's ascension to rule the Federated Commonwealth, he had Galen's *Crusader* painted in Kell Hounds colors and stationed in a place of honor beside the Archon's throne.

Due to Ryan Steiner's machinations, Galen was challenged to a duel on Solaris VII in 3056 by Skye Tigers champions Victor Vandegriff and Glen Edenhoffer. Alongside Kai-Allard Liao, piloting a -5M provided by Kallon Industries, Galen took on Vandegriff's *Goliath* and Edenhoffer's *Stalker* in the winding underground labyrinth of the Kobe district's Ishiyama arena. In the Grand Gallery at the maze's center, Galen worked in tandem with Kai to outmaneuver the Skye duelists, sending their assault-class machines crashing down to humiliating defeat.

After Galen's "death" and the Lyran Alliance's secession, Katherine kept Galen's *Crusader* in place for a period of mourning, with black garlands wrapped around its wrists to display her grief for her lost love.



GALEN COX



POSITION/RANK	COLONEL (FREE WORLDS LEAGUE MILITARY)
AFFILIATION/UNIT	FREE WORLDS LEAGUE
BIRTH YEAR	3012

Paul was the only child of Force Commander Jean Masters, a decorated member of the First Marik Militia who was repeatedly passed over for promotion due to her insistence on honorable battle etiquette over expediency. Paul did his best to live by her ideals. Enrolling at the Allison MechWarrior Institute, his cadet company was on field exercises in support of the Second Sirian Lancers on Procyon in 3030 when his position was swarmed by Tikonov-backed guerrilla infantry, who attacked with suicidal frenzy. Paul drove them back, killing hundreds, and retreated with the surviving Lancers. Returning to the Institute, he graduated with honors, but was deeply affected by the carnage he witnessed.

Assigned to his mother's former unit, he became friends with Captain-General Thomas Marik (later known as Thomas Halas) after serving as his aide during the Andurien Uprising. Force Commander Masters led his troops against the First and Sixth Defenders of Andurien during their last stand at Jojoken, ending Dame Catherine Humphreys' secessionist ambitions.

Paul worried that the recovery of *lostech* would transform warfare, with the return of weapons of mass destruction sparking a technological race to the bottom that would eventually consume the entirety of human civilization. In 3053, he suggested Thomas launch a coup to unite the provinces of the Free Worlds League under the control of an elite cadre of MechWarriors that would re-establish a restrictive code of warfare out of self-interest.

Thomas rejected the coup idea, but proposed achieving Paul's goal by creating a warrior elite the common people would beg to rule over them—a new knightly order loyal to Thomas, noble in spirit, and committed to the ideals of chivalry. Inspired by the legends of King Arthur, they created the Knights of the Inner Sphere and dispatched them across the League to do good deeds in Thomas' name.

On Gibson, the newly knighted Sir Paul Masters found himself embroiled in a gruesome guerilla war. Paul witnessed youth trained as mindless killers, battlefield success measured in body counts, and atrocities committed by all sides, until the Knights to put an end to the carnage. In the aftermath, he received the title of Count and rule of Gibson from his liege.

Paul and his Gold Knights were invited to join Task Force Serpent to serve as its conscience and ensure that the mission to destroy Clan Smoke Jaguar's ability to wage war did not become an all-out genocide. On those grounds, he opposed the use of orbital bombardment, the assassination of enemy commanders, and fighting in urban areas where civilians could be endangered. Due to his concern for the Clan civilians, he was appointed as the Star League's first Ambassador to the Clans.

After returning to the Inner Sphere, he was promoted to general and placed in overall command of both Knights regiments. In 3068, he accompanied the Twentieth Marik Militia and the Gold Knights in a strike against Lyran Alliance staging bases on Giasar. When mercenary attacks devastated the Militia command structure, he assumed control of all League forces on planet and remained behind when the First Knights were unexpectedly recalled to Atreus, where they fell to Blakist treachery.

Stunned by this news, and that his boon companion Thomas Marik was an impostor, Paul left Giasar and joined other Knights who had missed the recall order while on detached service in Lyran space. It remains unclear what transpired afterwards, but in early 3069, the shattered ruin of Paul Masters' 'Mech was found on Helm near the outskirts of Helmdown, where locals claimed he died defending the city from the Fifty-second Shadow Division.

PXH-3M *PHOENIX HAWK* [MODIFIED]

ROC

POWER PLANT	HERMES 270 XL	MASS	45 TONS	CRUISING SPEED	64 KPH
COMM SYSTEM	NEIL 6000	CHASSIS	EARTHWERKS PXH II ENDO STEEL	MAXIMUM SPEED	97 KPH
T&T SYSTEM	OCTAGON TARTRAC SYSTEM C	ARMAMENT	1 DIVERSE OPTICS SUNBEAM EXTENDED-RANGE LARGE LASER 2 MARTEN MEDIUM PULSE LASERS 2 HOLLY SRM 4 PACKS 1 LINDBLAD SHOTGUN ANTI-MISSILE SYSTEM 1 M100 MACHINE GUN	JUMP JETS	RAWLINGS 45
ARMOR	DURALLEX LIGHT WITH CASE			JUMP CAPACITY	180 METERS

Inspired by the chivalric knights of legend, Paul believed the BattleMech to be an extension of its pilot, making them larger than life. He felt the human spirit needed to expand to match the advance of technology, but worried that people would concede their souls to the machinery and let the weapons, rather than their wielders, create legends.

Paul inherited *Roc*, his mother's PXH-1 *Phoenix Hawk*, when he joined the First Marik Militia. He made excellent use of its speed and maneuverability while leading his battalion in a rapid flanking maneuver during the siege of Jojoken in 3039.

Roc received a PXH-3M field upgrade in 3050, adding extended-range and pulse lasers and converting one machine gun to an anti-missile system, though Paul subsequently had one of the extended-range large lasers removed and replaced with additional short-range missile four-packs.

As a knight-errant on Gibson, Paul had *Roc* painted in the red and silver of the Knights of the Inner Sphere by Jen, his long-time personal tech. In those colors, he led the Knights against the Word of Blake True Believers and Regular Hussars on the Plains of Portent. During the battle, *Roc's* speed was instrumental in saving the Knights from the Gibson Freedom League's attempt to bombard the battlefield with Star League-era Davy Crockett tactical nuclear weapons. When the Knights expanded to two regiments in size, *Roc* was repainted in the First Knights' new white and gold livery.

When he departed the Inner Sphere with Task Force Serpent, Paul brought *Roc* with him, but technical issues forced him to switch to an *Anvil*,

which was destroyed on Huntress. Though he fought the remainder of the campaign from a captured *Nobori-nin*, he returned to the Inner Sphere and resumed command of the Knights at *Roc's* helm, a knight loyal to his faithful steed.



SIR PAUL MASTERS



POSITION/RANK	LIEN-ZHANG (WARRIOR HOUSE HIRITSU)
AFFILIATION/UNIT	CAPELLAN CONFEDERATION
BIRTH YEAR	3034

Born into poverty in the harsh slums of Randar, Aris was orphaned at an early age and mastered survival skills while his peers were still learning to read. Rejected by Warrior House recruiters at age ten, he spent more than a year casing the Warrior House Hiritsu stronghold in an all-or-nothing gambit to prove his worth. On his thirteenth birthday, he infiltrated its inner sanctum and stole Crescent Moon, the katana gifted to the founder of House Hiritsu by the Chancellor himself. Impressed by his boldness and skill, House Master Virginia York accepted his request to join the Hiritsu ranks, though he paid a harsh penance for having violated the House's strict traditions.

In Hiritsu, the orphaned Aris found the family he never had, and he dedicated himself to intense study of its martial traditions under the grudging mentorship of his *sifu*, Ty Wu Non. Training for Hiritsu's infantry battalion, he became an expert scout, marksman, infiltrator, and assassin. As one of House Master York's honor guards, he single-

handedly saved her life in 3051 on Gei-Fu. When he defeated Master York in a BattleMech simulator battle at the age of 20, she presented him with a katana, the symbol of the Warrior House.

Aris adopted the beliefs and traditions of Hiritsu, praying to the old gods when going into battle, dedicating himself to loyalty and martial excellence per the Lorix Creed, and living by the philosophy of K'ung-fu-tzu, who taught obedience to superiors, treating inferiors virtuously, and always practicing courtesy and respect to others, regardless of their station. He pledged his will to the House Master and the Chancellor—the Celestial Wisdom—above all others.

Aris played a key role in the reclamation of Kaifeng from the Sarna Supremacy by uncovering traitors within Hiritsu and using them to pass false intelligence to draw the Supremacy forces into a trap. Aris personally used Crescent Moon to execute the man who had murdered House Master York, finding it fitting for her sword to deliver her justice.

On Hustaing in 3060, Aris disobeyed House Master Ty Wu Non and sought to rescue Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao's fiancé Isis Marik from both the Blackwind Lancers and the vicious street gangs that dominated the ruined city of Qingliu. Believing his loyalty to the Celestial Wisdom outweighed his duty to his House Master, he emerged from the criminal underworld with Isis alive. His dedication to Isis Marik attracted the attention of Blakist agent Setiwah of the Manei Domini, who had been tasked with safeguarding Isis by her biological father—Thomas "The Master" Marik.

During the Xin Sheng War, Aris came to view the Compact's citizens and soldiers not as enemies, but victims who shared his own Capellan blood. Nonetheless, he resolved to do his duty to the Chancellor while ensuring that he and his troops carried out their orders in accordance with their ideals and beliefs. During the liberation of St. Ives, he fought honorably and with due concern and respect for the defending warriors. He viewed the war as a chance to bring the Capellan nation back together, and condemned Kali Liao's nerve agent attacks as indicative of his fellow Capellans' loss of their moral center.

Aris perished in 3072 while on a mission to aid anti-Blakist resistance operations in the Magistracy of Canopus—lured by Setiwah with a false distress call. After the Blakist defeat, Magistracy forces recovered a child with genetic markers matching Aris, and returned him to House Hiritsu's care. Aris' granddaughter, Sandra, was born in 3107 and now fights alongside Danai Centrella-Liao while seeking to emulate Aris' martial and philosophical perfection.

STG-3R *STINGER*

FU SHEN

POWER PLANT	GM 120
COMM SYSTEM	DATA COM 26
T&T SYSTEM	DYNATEC 990
ARMOR	RIESE 100

MASS	20 TONS
CHASSIS	EARTHWERKS STG
ARMAMENT	OMNICON 3000 MEDIUM LASER
	LFN LINBLAD MACHINE GUNS

CRUISING SPEED	64 KPH
MAXIMUM SPEED	97 KPH
JUMP JETS	CHILTON 360
JUMP CAPACITY	180 METERS



As a member of House Hiritsu's infantry battalion, 16-year-old Aris Sung had extensive training in anti-'Mech tactics. In 3051, when House Master Virginia York was presiding over the execution of high-ranking separatist rebels on Gei-Fu, a *Stinger* emerged from the Nunya River and killed the anti-'Mech infantry squad with its first volley. Aris tackled Master York and pulled her out of the line of fire.

Using grappling rods seized from the corpses of his comrades, he climbed to the *Stinger's* cockpit and pressed his bulky medkit against its viewport while giving the MechWarrior inside his best fanatical glare. The Third Militia pilot inside was convinced that it was a satchel charge Aris was willing to detonate, and quickly surrendered. Back on the ground, House Master York handed Aris the rebel's neurohelmet, telling him, "You caught it. Now learn to use it."

Aris took to MechWarrior training with the same dedication he showed in the infantry, and took excellent care of his BattleMech. He named his mount *Fu Shen*, acknowledging his good fortune that his bluff had succeeded. Recalling the oath he swore when he first joined House Hiritsu, he set his activation code phrase as "I am right where I wanted to be. Now I must survive it."

Fu Shen was heavily damaged during a raid on a Free Capella cell in No Return's capital of Rubicon. Secessionists, tipped off to the raid, ambushed the Maskirovka strike team. Aris threw his 'Mech at the insurgent position, shielding the Maskirovka troops with its torso and crushing the rebels. Rather than repair the old militia *Stinger*, Master York rewarded Aris' heroism with a factory-fresh TR-1 *Wraith*.

ARIS SUNG



POSITION/RANK	DUKE OF ROBINSON; FIELD MARSHAL (ARMED FORCES OF THE FEDERATED SUNS); DIRECTOR, DRACONIS MARCH REGIONAL COMMAND; MINISTER OF THE DRACONIS MARCH;
AFFILIATION/UNIT	PRINCE'S CHAMPION FEDERATED SUNS
BIRTH YEAR	3019

The ducal heir of House Sandoval, rulers of Robinson for fifteen generations and one-time co-equal Princes of the Federated Suns alongside the Davions and other March lords, Tancred was schooled in the traditions of his family--deliberation, preparation, and above all, hatred of House Kurita, whose invasions had spread death and ruin across the Draconis March for centuries. Despite such a heritage, and in defiance of his father Duke James Sandoval's wishes, Tancred charted his own path, attending the Sakhara Academy rather than the Robinson Battle Academy and accepting a position in the Federated Commonwealth's Interior Secretariat instead of taking command of the Robinson Rangers.

Tall and ruggedly handsome, with gleaming black hair shaved and braided into a traditional tight Robinson topknot, Tancred's amber eyes and fluid grace (not to mention his family title) made Baron Sandoval one of the Federated Commonwealth's most eligible bachelors. He developed a strong friendship with Victor Steiner-Davion and his sister, Yvonne, serving as her advisor when Victor

appointed her as his regent on New Avalon. Though he thwarted many of Katherine Steiner-Davion's efforts to usurp Yvonne's regency, Tancred's efforts to quell rising tension on the Combine border gave Katherine the opening she needed to declare herself First Princess, prompting Tancred and Yvonne to flee into exile on Luthien.

In support of Victor's non-aggression pact with the Combine, Tancred returned to Robinson to forestall rash action by either Duke James or Arthur Steiner-Davion, but his efforts at diplomacy were shattered by a bombing that killed Arthur and gave James a pretext to invade the Combine. Refusing to get caught up in anti-Combine hysteria and seeing only ruin in such rash action, Tancred resigned his commission with the Rangers, unwilling to lead them into an unwinnable campaign.

As the Federated Commonwealth erupted into civil war, Tancred worked to build a support base for Victor in the Draconis March, rallying forces on Cassias and battling Katherine's loyalists on Mayetta and Woodbine. He demonstrated to the nobles of the March that he would fight to protect them from Katherine, while James had abandoned them for the chance to kill Kuritans. With more troops rallying to him, Tancred carried the fighting to Tamma, where he was hospitalized from exposure to chemical and biological weapons.

Summoned to Robinson in 3065, Tancred found Duke James mentally and physically broken by the failure of his anti-Combine campaign, and was accepted by a quorum of House Sandoval members as the new Duke, formally being sworn in at a Change of Command ceremony after thwarting a plot by rogue Wyndham-Sandovals to discredit him and force a resumption of war with the Combine. Instead, Duke Tancred brokered peace by ceding Breed and Kesai IV to the Combine, freeing his forces to focus on Katherine. He led pro-Victor forces to New Valencia, Galax and, ultimately, New Avalon.

Narrowly escaping death when the Word of Blake attacked the 3067 Whitting Conference on Tharkad, Tancred went into hiding on Markesan, wed Yvonne, and became her trusted advisor and co-ruler, taking the title of Prince's Champion. Tancred was injured in the 3073 Donner Bombing on Arc-Royal and met with Devlin Stone during his recuperation, bringing the Federated Suns into Stone's anti-Blakist coalition. Following the liberation of New Avalon in 3075, he returned to oversee the rebuilding of both the capital and the shattered AFFS.

In Tancred's absence, however, his cousin Jerome Sandoval built a power base on Robinson and, following the 3093 "Death Mist" crisis on Benet III, ousted Tancred as Duke in what came to be called the Sandoval Civil War. Tancred died of natural causes in 3098.

NSR-9J NIGHTSTAR

ÉPÉE

POWER PLANT	PITBAN 285 XL	MASS	95 TONS	CRUISING SPEED	32 KPH
COMM SYSTEM	TEK BATTLECOM	CHASSIS	NORSE-GM HEAVY TRQ	MAXIMUM SPEED	54 KPH
T&T SYSTEM	DLK TYPE PHASED ARRAY SENSORS	ARMAMENT	1 DEFIANCE 1001 ER PPC 2 NORSE-STORM MODEL 7D GAUSS RIFLES 2 DEFIANCE P5M MEDIUM PULSE LASERS 1 EXOSTAR SMALL LASER	JUMP JETS	NONE
ARMOR	KALLON ROYALSTAR HEAVY TYPE K			JUMP CAPACITY	NONE

An acclaimed fencing master, Tancred was known for his speed, grace, precision strikes, and ability to outthink his opponents. He utilized his BattleMech with matching skill, and named his 95-ton *Nightstar* after his preferred dueling blade, deftly delivering Gauss slugs, particle beams and lasers to his foes' most vulnerable areas. He painted it in the Robinson Rangers' traditional black and red camouflage pattern—meant to intimidate enemies rather than provide concealment.

In a simulator duel on Tukayyid after Victor's return from Strana Mechty, Tancred battled Victor's heavier *Prometheus* to a draw. He proved his skill on a real battlefield later that year on Robinson, defending the Battle Academy against unidentified raiders—alternately suspected of being Black Dragon hardliners, Blakist suicide troops, or mercenaries hired by factions hoping to embroil the Combine and Draconis March in a new cycle of warfare—alongside Arthur Steiner-Davion. Together, they made short work of six 'Mechs, with Tancred claiming most of the kills.

Fighting against his fellow countrymen in a seemingly endless war of attrition, Tancred was exhausted from living in his *Nightstar's* cockpit for days at a time, his hands gripping the controls until his fingers grew stiff. Épée anchored the Allied lines from the Plains of Quaree to the Tuskunge Depression, in the forests of the Irullan Expanse, and forcing the Darrant River Crossing. Battles faded into one another—Molson's Wash, the street-to-street fighting in Rhinehold, the Zappal Peninsula, the high plains of Cor-de-Francisco, and the siege of Fort Theodore Jannus.

On New Avalon, Tancred landed at the head of the Second Robinson Rangers, deploying against their sister regiment, the Third Rangers, on the Rostock continent. At Gaveston Gorge, attempting to force the river crossing against Lieutenant General Jason McBride's *Devastator*, Tancred's battered *Nightstar* finally succumbed, collapsing on the banks of the Gaveston.



TANCRED SANDOVAL

THE JIN

AD ERA

FOR THE PROMISE

CAMERON ST JAMAIK

AWS - 10KM AWESOME | DEMONA

DEVLIN STONE

AS7 - D - H ATLAS II [MODIFIED] | PHANTOM

ALYS ROUSSET - MARIK

VTR - 9D VICTOR | NIGHT LIGHTNING

DAMIEN LUCILLE [LUCIFER]



FOR THE PROMISE

HERBERT A. BEAS II

TWENTY MINUTES EARLIER

Looking out from the tarmac of its local spaceport some three kilometers away, Helmdown seemed barely worthy of being called a proper city. Even though it was the planetary capital, the local census put its population below 200,000—less than one percent of the global total.

Most of its citizens lived in blocks of heavily insulated, brick-faced homes clustered in groups around the two dozen or so eight-to-twelve-story “skyscrapers” that made up its central commercial district. A few more classically styled, ferrocrete-columned government buildings lurked just south of the commercial zone, while much of the north and western fringes were dominated by the looming shadows and steam towers of steely gray industrial plants and warehouses.

Sprawling about in irregular, fragmentary rings beyond the inner residences were a collection of smaller homes in more varied styles and colors, gathered in irregular, looping communities likely planned by competing real estate groups. Many of these micro-suburbs were difficult to make out amid the gently rolling hills surrounding the overgrown township, while clumps of dull green and brown conifers struggled to rise above them in an effort to grab as much of Helm’s meager sunlight as they could manage.

A modest river, fed mostly by snowmelt from the mountains rising less than five kilometers past the industrial zone, ran through the city, forking just west of the commercial areas and flowing out in two branches toward a shallow sea south and east of the spaceport. Power to the city—as well as its nearby

suburbs, the spaceport, and the domed agriplexes dotting the more distant plains—came from a pair of fusion reactor facilities located about fifteen kilometers away, their load regulated and distributed by a few substations throughout the city.

To the more heavily populated worlds of the Inner Sphere, the city of Helmdown might be considered mundane, perhaps even quaint. But to Poltergeist Precentor Sigma Damien Lucille—staring down at it through the true vision of his *Griffin’s* sensor suite—it was, in this moment, just another target.

SEVENTEEN DAYS EARLIER

The ship was too damned quiet.

Lucille suspected a trap even before they boarded. Hanging as it was from the parasol of its jump sail, just fifty thousand kilometers off Nestor’s true zenith jump point, the old *Explorer*-class JumpShip exuded the feel of a derelict. Despite the fact that its running lights continued to blink and its station-keeping thrusters continued to sporadically fire in microbursts, and despite its transponder’s faithful, automatic response to radar pings, an inescapable sensation settled into Lucille’s subconscious that *something* was amiss.

The first clue confirming his suspicions was the utter lack of any response to hails from his Free Worlds-flagged shuttlecraft as it closed on the vessel for a “routine customs inspection.” As his shuttle closed on the ship, close enough to read the name *Sacajawea* stenciled in meter-high block letters on its blunt forward hull, no target sensor warnings sounded. A casual orbit around the vessel before docking

revealed some scorch marks and cratering—scars from past skirmishes, Lucille imagined—but nothing hull-rending. The lifeboat launch tubes were closed, as were all the other visible hatches and access doors. This posed a minor concern, as there were no other points at which the shuttle could dock.

When no shooting erupted, even after several increasingly urgent demands for the crew to open up, Lucille *knew* it was a trap. Even as Adept Kano went EVA with his Longinus battlesuit to cut into the JumpShip's hull and override one of its shuttle bay doors, the *Sacajawea* offered no resistance whatsoever.

Once aboard, Adepts Kano and Prior secured the ship's engineering section and sounded the all-clear within minutes of stepping off the shuttle. The reactor was undamaged and operating normally, maintaining the electronics, monitoring the charge rate of the Kearny-Fuchida system, regulating the internal life support apparatus—all of which functioned well within the norms established by generations of JumpShip engineering.

But while all the systems thrummed along well enough, there wasn't a soul to be found anywhere in the whole aft compartment. Everything was running on automatic.

Adepts Nonehe and Sakov, moving through the middle decks, echoed their comrades' reports. Sweeping first through the shuttle and cargo bays before advancing through the sealed grav deck to check the crew quarters, they identified numerous aftermarket modifications to the ship's internal arrangement—mostly in the form of reduced shuttle space and smaller officer staterooms favor of an impressive collection of superficially concealed weapon blisters—but no personnel.

So where was the trap?

Lucille and Adept Warren took the top decks, where they quickly cleared chamber after chamber without a single contact. The main computer cores, the K-F drive controller system, a cluster of conference and observation rooms—all empty. As they entered the main bridge, the magnetized boots of their battlesuits clanking against the floor grates, they remained alert, their true senses searching for telltales of hidden triggers, sudden movement, anything that would foretell of disaster.

All they found were empty seats, blank screens, and dim lighting.

Warren voiced his thoughts first as he moved to the nav station. "Who sets the parking brake on a 400 million C-bill piece of *lostech* and just abandons it with all the lights on?"

"A ship like this could probably fetch even more than that," Lucille muttered as his true vision swept the bridge for the tenth time and still found nothing amiss. His eyes finally settled on the captain's chair.

"The question stands," Warren deadpanned.

"Let's see if they left a note," Lucille said, raising his Purifier's single armored glove toward the control panel affixed to the chair's left armrest. The fold-up screen came to life with a menu, from which he quickly found and selected *Ship's Log*.

Lucille felt his mouth run dry as only one entry appeared, time-stamped two days ago.

The video screen resolved to an image of a severe, sharp-featured man with pale blue eyes and dark—but graying—hair. The man wore the purple-trimmed white twill jacket of a Free Worlds League Militia officer, but with a notable lack of insignia or decorations. Lucille recognized the man immediately, even before his image began to speak:

"Whoever—or whatever—you are," he said with barely masked contempt, "I welcome you to the Sacajawea on behalf of her previous owners. If my face is unfamiliar to you, know that I am Sir Paul Masters, General and Knight of the Inner Sphere..."

"Seriously?" Warren whispered in disbelief. Lucille waved him back into silence.

"By now," Masters's image went on, "you are likely wondering if you have walked into a trap. I assure you, on my honor as a Knight, that there is no trap here. Only this message. I admit that the temptation to sabotage that ship, beyond merely reformatting its entire computer core and erasing her logs, was great indeed, but from what I've been told, and what I've seen from your people's work on Atreus, such cowardly ploys are more your style than mine. I've been told this might be unwise, but in this moment, I'd rather be true to myself, than take on the guise of your kind..."

Lucille resisted the urge to roll his eyes and instead clenched his jaw. *These people and their precious honor.*

On the screen, Masters narrowed his eyes and continued. *"Suffice it to say, Doctor Stevens and her compatriots—including the crew of that ship you're standing on—are under the protection of my Knights. To that end, I assure you, by the time you receive this message, they are already very, very far from this system. You and your murderous, robotic kind are free to continue looking for them all you like, but I doubt you'll have much luck. Hell, even I don't know where they're going at this point."*

"But understand this, you bionic monstrosities: Your kind have no place in my realm, or in any part of the Inner Sphere. You, and the twisted corruption of your Word of Blake, will never prevail in this war you started. Your days are numbered, and those numbers are fewer than you can imagine..."

"Bigot," Warren grumbled. Facing the nearby console, he was already tapping his way through what Lucille recognized as the JumpShip's navigational database. Like the ship's log directory, it displayed virtually no text at all.

"I'd say 'may God have mercy on your souls' at this point," Masters concluded, "but from what I've seen and heard of your kind, I'm pretty sure there are no souls among you."

Lucille felt his cheeks and forehead heat as the video message dissolved to blackness. Tightening his fist, he felt only a modicum of satisfaction when the armrest control panel snapped off the captain's chair and crumpled in his grasp.

Fools like these are why we exist, he reminded himself, echoing the sentiments spoken by Precentor Apollyon more times than he cared to count.

"He spoke the truth, Precentor," Warren spoke at last. "The ship's nav and comms logs are empty. The core backups are wiped clean. IA's techs could probably dig up most of the data, but that'd take some time."

Lucille let his rage out in a serpentine hiss. "We can't afford to wait on that," he said. "The timestamp on this little love note is just two days old, but there's no

other jump traffic within that long a burn other than us and this museum relic. They only *just* left."

"Orders?"

Lucille narrowed his eyes and nodded. "You and the others pull any local storage you can from the engineering and astrogation computers. If there's anything useful for IA, it'll be in those. Then, start scuttling this wreck, and make it messy."

"Sounds wasteful," Warren said, but without a hint of defiance.

"A message of our own," Lucille explained. "In case anyone is foolish enough to come back for their ship."

"Understood."

"And as for *Sir* Masters, he's about to become the League's most wanted fugitive. There can be only one punishment for a man who abandons his post to give aid and comfort to an enemy of the state, after all."

Warren turned his head slightly. "Precentor?"

"Masters and his liege should have stayed out of this," Lucille said. "They bring this on themselves."

NOW

Dusk was still hours away, but under the heavy clouds, the lights of Helmdown were already coming up. Streetlamps illuminated the roadways in a state of bedlam, reflecting their gleam off the chassis of personal vehicles scurrying about, swerving often to avoid collisions with each other or the pedestrians blindly running into their paths. Raid sirens blared, and digital billboards flashed warnings to any who somehow missed them, imploring the populace to seek shelter. Black smoke rose in the northwest as fires raged amid the city's warehouse district, where one could also hear the plaintive wail of fire engines and the occasional *thump* of secondary explosions.

The damage and panic just four 'Mechs could bring upon a city was never small.

To their credit, the Helmsguard—Helm's global paramilitary security force—responded quickly enough at the sight of unknown forces advancing

toward the capital boroughs. But with only so many armored vehicles and *Inquisitors* on hand, the police units found themselves hard-pressed to do much against the four-pronged attack. Even if they had the manpower, upgunned trucks and SecurityMechs could accomplish little against the superior firepower, armor, and maneuverability of bleeding-edge BattleMechs in the hands of the Master's Chosen.

Precentor Damien Lucille stepped over the smoldering wreck of a Helmsguard *Inquisitor* that lay half-sprawled across a four-lane intersection in the city's south suburbs. The 35-ton machine, an industrial-grade knock-off of Irian Technologies' more well-known *Hermes* BattleMech, looked nearly pristine, its blue-and-white paint job hardly scratched at all. Only the blackened hole in its chest betrayed the cause of its demise.

A second *Inquisitor* stood just a block away, looming over the parking lot of a convenience store. Like the first, it was nearly unblemished, save for its missing head. Upon losing their 'Mech support, the three armored police cars that came with them spun about and screeched further into the city. The flight of LRMs Lucille sent after them was barely an afterthought; he'd hardly even spared an eyblink in their direction to confirm whether or not the warheads found their mark.

Fifteen minutes ago, Lucille had commandeered all local radio and video channels to demand the treacherous former Knight of the Inner Sphere, Paul Masters, come out from wherever he now hid among the lands near Helmdown. Failure to do so, he promised, would result in harsh consequences for the local citizenry. Lucille then ordered Adepts Prior, Nonehe, and Sakov to mount up and take up positions at the edge of each of the city's ordinal quadrants—north, west, and east, respectively. Lucille himself took the south quadrant, following the ten-kilometer road that served as the main artery between the city and its attendant spaceport.

Five minutes ago, with no meaningful response from either the fugitive Knight or anyone in the city who might know of his location, Lucille gave the attack order. As one, all four BattleMechs from the Fifty-second Shadow Division slowly advanced toward the city center, cutting through any buildings, vehicles, or people who stood in their path. So far, Nonohe's path had proved the most dramatic after his *Bloodhound's* SRMs set off a cascading series of explosions in a natural gas refinery within the industrial zone.

Lucille ordered all units to leave all their comm frequencies open, and silently basked in the frantic pleas for mercy and help that crisscrossed the radio waves. Some begged, some tried to bribe, and some lied—anything to try and convince him and his MechWarriors to stop. But Lucille held his tongue and kept his ears open for one voice, and one voice only.

The slaughter was seven minutes in when that voice finally cried out at him.

"Stop!" screamed Paul Masters, his voice nearly cracking in hysteria. "Stop this madness! Those are innocent non-combatants, for God's sake!"

With a few deliberate thoughts, Lucille closed all the other channels but his team's, and the one Masters was using. "It's about time you showed up, General Masters," he said into the latter. "I thought I was going to have to find a hospital or two."

"Yes, I'm here, damn it!" Masters growled. "Call off your attack!"

"Will you comply with my request?"

"I'm on my way, you bastard. Surely, you can see me!"

Lucille's mind reached out through the extended range of his *Griffin's* sensors, and found the new thermal and electromagnetic anomaly lurching its way toward the city from the southwest. "Indeed I can," he said with a grim smile. "What an honorable fellow you are, after all."

"What would you people know of honor?" Masters scoffed. "Jerome Blake must be spinning in his grave!"

"Don't presume to lecture me on the Sainted Blake, Sir Masters. Your ignorance on the subject is almost cosmic. But you have come, and so these citizens shall be spared." Lucille's attention turned to the tactical channel briefly. "Hammer Team, cease fire and fall back to the DropShip. Take care not to step on anyone along the way."

A few wordless clicks responded as the other MechWarriors acknowledged the orders. Lucille himself turned away as well, backtracking along his own wake of devastation, toward the main southern road, carefully measuring and placing each step to avoid anything that looked alive.

"Hundreds dead," Masters lamented, "just to get at me. What kind of savages are you people?"

Lucille let just a sliver of his contempt bleed into his voice. "Oh, good Sir Knight! We are the monsters who exist so you and your kind can go on with your precious nobility."

"You and your Word of Blake are no friends to us! We gave you shelter in the League for fifteen years, and you bring us back to the barbarism of total war—and for what?"

"For a better future, of course. Had the fools on Tharkad merely listened to reason, this 'total war' you decry would never have come to your precious League."

"We didn't—"

"And I find your speech on behalf of the Free Worlds laughable, since you have abandoned your post and given aid to its enemies."

Masters gave an almost animal snarl. "You murdered my brothers and sisters with poison gas, along with countless innocents. You are the League's enemies!"

"Blame the *pretender* you follow for that," Lucille came back with a sneer. "You are a traitor, Knight, led by a traitor."

"And so you are here to arrest me, is that it? In whose name? By whose authority?"

"The Master I serve is your rightful lord as well. The liege you swore your Knights to is merely his pale shadow, whose time has reached its end."

"I serve no Blakist, you soulless robot. I have *no* liege now! My duty is to my brothers and sisters alone!"

"Commendable," Lucille said flatly. "I shall see you soon."

It took another minute or two to emerge from the suburbs without inflicting more casualties. A single, jet-powered leap after that put the *Griffin* squarely astride the road to Helmdown's spaceport. By then, the blip he knew as Masters was less than a half-kilometer distant, moving through the nearby woods.

Lucille was under no delusion that Masters would be easy prey—certainly no easier than those weekend warriors he'd slain in Helmdown's city streets with barely a thought. Even so, the frail Knight's opening

maneuver was bolder than he expected. The white and gold *Phoenix Hawk* burst up from the thick line of towering, deep green coal-firs lining the roadway before him, its right arm laser flashing out to catch Lucille's *Griffin* in the left shoulder baffle. Lucille winced at the scalding sensation as a half-ton of armor evaporated in an instant, but drew focus from the pain rather than let it bother him.

Twisting slightly to keep his left side forward, Lucille backstepped quickly, feeling first pavement, then roadside gravel cracking under his metal-shod feet. Holding his left arm like a shield, he raised the right and snapped a PPC bolt across his midsection, keeping his aim low. The semi-coherent beam of cerulean light tore at the *Hawk's* right thigh, putting a brief hitch in Masters' stride, but failing to cut through the armor.

The Knight came on, unleashing a barrage of SRMs from his left arm launchers. Lucille felt five blows in all, most peppering his left arm and side like a flurry of fists. Tapping his toes, he leaped back and away just as Masters added his lasers to the mix, but held his ground for less than half a second before making a forward jump while spitting a cloud of LRMs back. The shower of missiles crashed blindly against earth, stone, and armor alike, scattering dust and debris everywhere.

Landing just meters away from the *Hawk's* right side, Lucille reached out to grab the barrel of its laser and tore the weapon free from its pistol-like mounting—but not before Masters fired again, pumping raw energy into his abdomen. Lucille hissed at the pain and spun about, delivering a mighty kick that smashed into the *Hawk's* right knee. The armor caved and the leg bent backward, but Masters shifted the 'Mech's 45-ton mass expertly, and staggered a step backward instead of falling over.

"Not bad," Lucille muttered to no one.

Another eight-pack of missiles flew from the *Phoenix Hawk*, as if in reply.

As Lucille continued to circle the Knight in their macabre dance, Warren's voice suddenly spoke to him from the tactical channel. "Precentor, Team Forge. It is done. We have secured the traitor's DropShip, and five of her crew, including the captain and navigator. No casualties to report. Vessel is intact."

Had so much time already passed? Lucille wondered for an instant. Even before launching their raid on

the capital, he and his Domini had identified the DropShip—a Capellan-made *Lung Wang* class—parked in the Helmdown spaceport. Despite multiple claims that the ship was “just a supply runner on detached service” that “carried absolutely no BattleMechs,” it didn’t take long to confirm it as Masters’ ride once the shooting started and its crew beamed a message out to their absent Knight.

“Excellent work, Adept,” Lucille answered. “I shall be along shortly.”

Now, to finish this...

With another sharp turn and the swing of his left arm, Lucille knocked the *Hawk’s* left arm away just a heartbeat before Masters fired his missiles again. The Knight landed a pair of pulse laser blasts in the exchange, but the burns Lucille felt were quickly forgotten as he swept his foot out once more and shattered Masters’ wounded leg entirely. The *Phoenix Hawk* tumbled gracelessly to the ground on the roadside, its torso sinking into an empty drainage ditch nearby. With a heavy stomp, Lucille pinned its left arm down beneath his *Griffin’s* foot, forcing the ‘Mech onto its back and keeping it there. Another shot from his particle beam savaged the *Hawk’s* other arm before it could rise up again.

“Your time has ended, Sir Masters,” Lucille said gravely. “For what it’s worth, I salute your integrity and your spirit.”

“Spare me your platitudes, cyborg!” Masters seethed.

“No,” Lucille said as he aimed the smoking muzzle of his PPC at the *Phoenix Hawk’s* bulbous faceplate. “You deserve them. Truly. You fought well, for a frail, but here you die.”

Masters paused. His next words were pleading. “The civilians—”

“We have what we came for now,” Lucille assured him. “There is no need to kill more.”

“You have—?” Masters began, the dawning realization evident in his voice. “Why? What was so important about the people from that ship?”

Lucille inhaled deeply. “They defiled our home, General,” he said. “And now it is gone. We must have justice for all who have been sacrificed for the Promise....even for you!”

Lucille fired, instantly vaporizing the *Phoenix Hawk’s* cockpit—warrior and all. Its control systems severed so abruptly, in such a surge of raw energy, that the BattleMech gave one momentary spasm before dying. Lucille stared at the wreck for a moment before turning back toward the spaceport.

“Team Forge,” he called on the tactical channel as he went. “I am en route. Please *do* tell me we have gained something for all our trouble here.”

“Yes, Precentor,” Adept Warren declared. “I believe we have. The ship’s logs have not been altered or destroyed, and the bridge crew has been most cooperative so far.”

“Blessed be,” Lucille said with a relieved sigh. “Then our hunt can continue.”





POSITION/RANK	PRECENTOR MARTIAL (WORD OF BLAKE MILITIA)
AFFILIATION/UNIT	WORD OF BLAKE
BIRTH YEAR	3027

Even before the Schism, St. Jamais was an expert MechWarrior and covert operative, among the best that ROM had to offer. St. Jamais trained with Blake's Wrath, the BattleMech arm of "old" ComStar's fearsome ROM intelligence and espionage apparatus. Ruthless, pragmatic, and fanatically devoted to what he saw as his Order's manifest destiny to rule over a devastated Inner Sphere, he naturally followed the majority of ROM to the nascent Word of Blake.

Unfettered by those who would openly align ComStar with the greedy, self-destructive House Lords, Cameron's ambitions grew under Precentor Demona Aziz, the former member of ComStar's First Circuit who led the Word's exodus to the safe havens of the Free Worlds League. His close relationship with Aziz drew him into her Toyama sect, where he forged and led its most ardent of followers: the Sixth of June. This initiative and zeal made Cameron a rising star among the Blakists, even as the moderates among their ruling conclave conspired to marginalize Aziz and her hawkish Toyamas.

Consequently, he found himself sidelined along with them when the rest of the Word seized Terra from the reformist ComStar in 3058.

Though largely confined to relatively minor operations on the edge of League space, Cameron's influence grew until he and his radicals effectively dominated the Toyama sect. It thus came as a little surprise when, after a failed effort to meddle in Periphery affairs led to Aziz's death in 3059, St. Jamais became the Toyamas' new leader. This, it is believed, is when he first drew the attention of the Word's *true* Master, Thomas Marik.

With his secret new benefactor's support, Cameron's power reached farther than ever before. In 3061, the assassination of Trent Arian and his aide on Terra—likely by Sixth of June operatives—enabled Cameron's ascent to the post of Precentor Martial. As head of the Word of Blake military, he built its strength toward a glorious new mission: the imminent coming of his Master's prophesized "Third Transfer." Embracing that ideal of a day when the realms of the Inner Sphere would embrace the Word of Blake as an equal and follow them into a final crusade against the Clans, Cameron devoted his every effort to solidifying the Word's martial unity and broadening its influence across the Free Worlds (and beyond) through covert and overt means alike. Skimming funds off the League's budget, raising whole divisions in secret, contracting hordes of mercenaries and pirates, blackmailing local governments, and even seducing Duchess Kali Liao for inroads into the Capellan power structure—Cameron's schemes included all this and more.

When the Second Star League ignominiously dissolved on the very eve of his Master's promised "Third Transfer," a furious Cameron triggered what would come to be known as the Jihad. At about this time, it is further believed that he executed the Word of Blake's Primus, William Blane of Gibson, and essentially took full command of the Word in all but name. The war that unfolded quickly ballooned beyond the Word's control, pitting the Blakists against virtually every realm in the Inner Sphere. St. Jamais resorted to ever-more desperate strategies to stave off defeat, relying on his Master's machinations for support until some time in the late 3070s, when a rift somehow developed between them.

Abandoned to his fate, Cameron's final years were spent desperately struggling to defend the Protectorate he and his forces had painstakingly built around Terra, until only Terra itself remained. A zealot to the last, he refused to surrender even as Devlin Stone's coalition assaulted humanity's home in 3078, and died in a furious duel against Stone at Devils Tower.

AWS-10KM AWESOME

DEMONA

POWER PLANT PITBAN 240

COMM SYSTEM GARRET T19-G WITH C³I COMPUTER AND GUARDIAN ECM

T&T SYSTEM DYNATEC 2780 WITH TARGETING COMPUTER

ARMOR DURALLEX HEAVY SPECIAL

MASS 80 TONS

CHASSIS TECHNICON TYPE G2 ENDO STEEL

ARMAMENT 2 TYPE XX EXTENDED-RANGE PPCS (CLAN)

1 MAGNA FLARESTAR SNUB-NOSE PPC

1 DIVERSE OPTICS EXTENDED-RANGE SMALL LASER

CRUISING SPEED 32 KPH

MAXIMUM SPEED 54 KPH

JUMP JETS NONE

JUMP CAPACITY NONE



The personalized Awesome piloted by Cameron St. Jamais during the Jihad was among the most advanced war machines of the Jihad *not* built expressly for use by the Manei Domini. Based on the -10KM variant developed in 3067 by the Free Worlds' Irian BattleMechs Unlimited and the Draconis Combine's Alshain Weapons of Tok Do, the 'Mech featured a fusion of Clan and Inner Sphere technologies that made it a lethal contender in anyone's hands, let alone a Blake's Wrath veteran like St. Jamais.

Named *Demon*a by its pilot—presumably after Demona Aziz, with whom Cameron may have had a romantic relationship in the Word of Blake's early days—this assault 'Mech featured ClanTech ER PPCs and double-strength heat sinks, mated with an advanced targeting computer and an improved C³ system that allowed for maximum coordination with its lancemates. To maximize its survivability, extra armoring was added to the engine, gyro, and cockpit systems, along with an ECM suite to foil enemy electronics.

All these modifications came into play during Cameron's final stand at the Devils Tower complex on Terra, where he and *Demon*a met Devlin Stone and his *Atlas II* in a duel practically made for holovid. Though each commander was backed up by an additional three assault 'Mechs, St. Jamais's force traded tonnage and armor for superior reach, accuracy, and battlefield support. These factors helped the Blakists deliver such withering damage to their enemies that it seemed possible they might prevail and turn the tide of battle after all. But Stone's determined advance, weathering the worst of Cameron's onslaught, eventually left the precentor martial with nowhere to run. In the end, both man and machine perished together, collapsing in a heap of broken metal on the sun-soaked steppes of North America.

CAMERON ST. JAMAIS

**POSITION/RANK**GENERAL (ALLIED COALITION),
EXARCH (REPUBLIC OF THE SPHERE)**AFFILIATION/UNIT**

ALLIED COALITION, REPUBLIC OF THE SPHERE

BIRTH YEAR

3043

The man known to history as Devlin Stone emerged amid the Word of Blake Jihad as an enigma that persists to this day. His life before March 3071—when he escaped the RBMU 105 prison camp on Kittery and launched his rebellion against the Word—has been the focus of so many investigations and wild theories that it has become almost impossible to separate the kernels of truth among them from the mountains of conjecture and fantastic lies. His steadfast refusal to discuss the subject, even after decades of such rampant speculation, has only fueled the mystery while simultaneously wearing down those who would solve it. Today, many have come to question whether such answers are truly worth pursuing any longer.

Regardless of where he came from, Stone became synonymous with the resistance that ultimately toppled the Word of Blake after the individual leaders of the Inner Sphere all failed. By building an effective coalition of allied forces, aided by fellow prisoners like David Lear and Belle Lee, his rebellion forged the short-lived Kittery Prefecture before expanding its efforts to the war at large. Among his many battlefield

accomplishments in the Jihad after Kittery was the 3073 Trial of Possession for the Tukayyid HPG, which became the site of his first meetings with Victor Steiner-Davion and other future members of his international alliance against the Blakists.

Leading from the front, Devlin Stone fought in numerous battles through the rest of the Jihad, including the 3074 defense of Skye and subsequent liberation of Hesperus II, the capture of Ascella in 3075, and numerous assaults on the Word of Blake Protectorate during Operation Scour. Facing a mix of both Cameron St. Jamais's Protectorate defenders and the elite Manei Domini cyborgs, Stone and his command narrowly avoided total disaster on numerous occasions, including the fierce fighting for New Home and the hidden bases at Luyten 68-28.

In 3078, barely more than seven years after his rebellion began, Devlin Stone led the final assault on Terra with an allied coalition comprised of virtually every major power in the Inner Sphere—Clan and House alike. After months of bitter, no-holds-barred fighting, it was Stone's own 'Mech that brought down the Word's leader on humanity's homeworld. With the death of Precentor Martial Cameron St. Jamais in the shadow of his Devils Tower fortress, the battle for Terra soon ended, and in its wake would rise a brave new Republic under Stone's leadership.

The decades that followed the Jihad and the creation of Devlin Stone's Republic of the Sphere would be seen by some as a new age of peace in which the war-ravaged realms of the Inner Sphere demobilized their armies and rebuilt their worlds. But it was not a time without its challenges. Stone's vision of a truly unified melting-pot Republic faced threats from within and without, with open warfare erupting particularly along its rimward borders, where the belligerent Capellan Confederation and the fractured states of the former Free Worlds League contested his upstart nation.

And yet, by 3130, Devlin Stone found himself in command of a thriving realm dedicated to peace, not war. Tired, but stoic, he stepped down from his post as the Republic's Exarch, passing the reins to Damien Redburn before vanishing from the public eye a short time later. Where he went, and why, sparked a new wave of speculation about the man who rose from the fires of the Jihad to bring about the Word's end, but the rumors were barely beginning to circulate when the Sphere-wide HPG Blackout struck, sparking a new age of chaos and war.

In 3145, as abruptly as he had disappeared, Devlin Stone returned to find his Republic beset by invaders from every side. Once more taking up the reins of power, he has vowed to save his legacy and restore the Republic's former glory, but with few allies and the Clans on Terra's doorstep, few believed that even the savior of the Jihad could truly bring an end to the Inner Sphere's Dark Age.

AS7-D-H ATLAS II [MODIFIED]

PHANTOM

POWER PLANT VLAR CLANTECH 300 XL

COMM SYSTEM ARMY COMM CLASS 5
WITH ANGEL ECM

T&T SYSTEM ARMY CORPORATION TYPE 29K
WITH ARTEMIS IV FCS

ARMOR DURALLEX SPECIAL HEAVY
WITH CASE II

MASS 100 TONS

CHASSIS FOUNDATION TYPE 10X

ARMAMENT 1 BLANKENBURG LB
10-X AUTOCANNON

1 HELGA SERIES 9-TUBE
MULTI-MISSILE LAUNCHER

2 RAKER-V MEDIUM PULSE LASERS

1 HOLLY-6 SRM LAUNCHER

2 CLAN SERIES 6B
EXTENDED-RANGE LARGE LASERS

1 SUREFIRE 444 ANTI-MISSILE SYSTEM

CRUISING SPEED 32 KPH

MAXIMUM SPEED 54 KPH

JUMP JETS NONE

JUMP CAPACITY NONE



The *Atlas II* known as *Phantom* was the personal 'Mech of Devlin Stone when he first broke free of the Blakist prison camps on Kittery. Captured from the arsenals of the Kittery garrison, *Phantom* was originally a standard-model AS7-D-H, built in the factories of Hesperus II during the years when the Word held that world.

As the battles of the Jihad took their toll, more and more of this 'Mech's original components were damaged and replaced by improved equipment from both Clan and Inner Sphere sources. This included *Phantom's* extended-range large lasers, extra-light engine, and heat sinks—all swapped out for ClanTech versions—as well as the improved technologies of CASE II, an Angel ECM suite, and cockpit systems thoroughly augmented with additional armor for extra protection. By the time Devlin Stone and his forces landed on Terra, his *Atlas II* was among the most advanced hybrid 'Mechs employed by the allied Coalition, which helped it stand toe-to-toe with the equally enhanced *Awesome* piloted by Cameron St. Jamais.

Painted in the distinct black-and-bones color scheme adopted by the Stone's Lament regiment, *Phantom* was as much a weapon of terror as it was of war. The hundred-ton machine embodied the death its MechWarrior promised to all who stood against him, and its presence on the field struck fear and awe among allies and enemies alike. It also served as the trademark for Devlin Stone himself, as he continued to pilot *Phantom* for years after the end of the Jihad and into the age of his newborn Republic of the Sphere.

When Stone finally retired from his post as the Republic's Exarch in 3130, *Phantom* retired with him, and both soon vanished from the public eye. The return of both the man and the 'Mech in 3145 signaled a new era for the beleaguered empire they built from the Jihad's ashes.



POSITION/RANK	DUCHESS OF AUGUSTINE; COLONEL
AFFILIATION/UNIT	FREE WORLDS LEAGUE; THE KRUSHERS
BIRTH YEAR	3041

Although Alys was the granddaughter of Captain-General Janos Marik and the daughter of Kristen Marik, the Duchess of Augustine, she grew up with no ambition to be involved in Free Worlds League politics. Instead, she aspired to a leadership position in her mother's mercenary unit, Kristen's Krushers, and graduated from the Princefield Military Academy. But the FedCom Civil War changed all of that: on Coventry, the Krushers became a target of Lyrans Loyalists, and Alys's mother, brother, and sister were killed in the unit's attempt to reach the Free Worlds League border. Her uncle, then-Captain-General Thomas Marik, had specifically forbidden League units from aiding in the Krushers' extractions, and this abandonment catalyzed Alys's entry into League politics.

In 3067, she delivered an impassioned speech to Parliament about Resolution 288, the law that enshrined House Marik's stranglehold on the Captain-Generalcy "until the crisis ends." She implored Parliament to repeal the resolution, knowing this

would remove Thomas Marik from power—a fitting revenge for him abandoning the Krushers when they needed his help. Her words did not move Parliament enough to vote on the repeal, but it did inadvertently spark the "Great Debate," the national political conversation about whether House Marik deserved to retain its claim to the post of Captain-General.

Thomas was revealed to be an imposter in 3069, but when the Word of Blake's Jihad targeted the Free Worlds League, Alys urged the League's military to support the false Thomas. The subsequent Blakist-backed coup that installed Corinne Marik as Captain-General saw Alys, now commander of the Krushers, become the de facto head of the Free Worlds Resistance movement. The Resistance's attack on Blakist forces led to the Word sending operatives after Alys, and blockading Augustine to deny her a place of refuge. She and the Krushers remained on the move, never establishing a permanent base and operating covertly to avoid Blakist assassins.

As the leader of a resistance movement actively fighting Word forces, Alys was invited to the summit on Arc-Royal in 3073. She survived the fateful Donner Bombing, which prompted her to fully cast her lot with Devlin Stone's Allied Coalition in taking the fight to the Word. Alys spearheaded the front that reclaimed former League worlds; for Operation Scour, the Coalition's assault on Terra, Stone assigned her the task of reclaiming the British Isles. During the campaign, her TerraSec enemies fought using the same hit-and-run style that the Krushers had long employed, forcing Alys to adjust tactics to bait the Blakists into a successful trap. The remaining Blakists in Great Britain surrendered to her on 17 September 3078. For her efforts, Devlin Stone named her a Paladin of the newly created Republic of the Sphere.

During the Capellan Crusades, Alys led the Republic's defenses against the Capellan Confederation's invasion of Liao. Near the conclusion of hostilities in March 3113, Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao led the Red Lancers against Alys's command, the Ninth Hastati Sentinels, and battle raged along the banks of the Cavalry River. When the Chancellor's 'Mech was shot down, the Red Lancers' enraged charge crushed the Ninth, forcing them into retreat. Alys ensured all of her senior officers reached safety before attempting to withdraw herself; however, she was downed while trying to fall back. The resulting head trauma left her unable to pilot a 'Mech, which prompted her to retire from the Council of Paladins, despite Stone's entreaties for her to stay.

Alys passed away peacefully on her Augustine estate on 14 July 3143, surrounded by family, including her grandson Thaddeus Marik, Knight of Augustine.

VTR-9D VICTOR

POWER PLANT	PITBAN 320
COMM SYSTEM	SIPHER SECURITY PLUS
T&T SYSTEM	MATABUSHI SENTINEL
ARMOR	DURALLEX HEAVYWITH CASE

MASS	80 TONS
CHASSIS	ALSHAIN CLASS 920 ENDO STEEL
ARMAMENT	DRAGON'S FIRE GAUSS RIFLE
	VICTORY HEARTBEAT MEDIUM PULSE
	LASERS TELOS-4 SRM LAUNCHER

NIGHT LIGHTNING

CRUISING SPEED	43 KPH
MAXIMUM SPEED	64 KPH
JUMP JETS	LEXINGTON LTD. LIFTERS
JUMP CAPACITY	120 METERS

The *Victor* known as *Night Lightning* originally belonged to Major Ana Rousset-Marik, Alys's older sister. Although Ana claimed the Capellan-built 'Mech came from a purchased lot of refurbished battlefield salvage, unsubstantiated rumors within the Krushers maintain it was originally a gift from a Capellan officer with whom she had a secret dalliance. Regardless of its provenance, *Night Lightning* served Ana well until the fateful battle on Coventry in May 3063, when she was killed while fighting the Coventry Jaegers. The 'Mech was recovered during the Krushers' retreat from the planet and returned to operational status, and Ana's will bequeathed the 'Mech to Alys, along with a cryptic, verigraphed note saying, "You know whom to contact."

Given the Krushers' penchant for engaging in night-combat operations, Ana had originally optimized *Night Lightning* to excel in darkness or low-light conditions. In addition to the searchlight that many Krushers 'Mechs mounted, for night ops this *Victor* traded the traditional Krushers paint scheme for a unique black, gray, and steel-blue camo designed to defeat standard optical sensors. Alys later took Ana's night-fighting specialty to the extreme by replacing the shot-out systems in the cockpit with command-and-control capabilities and a more sensitive sensor suite geared for detecting hidden nocturnal threats.

Night Lightning saw constant action during the Jihad, where Alys made good use out of its modifications to ambush Blakist troops with hit-and-run attacks. Unfortunately, these tactics failed to protect her from the Red Lancers' wrath on Liao in 3113, which resulted in the injuries that forced her and *Night Lightning* into retirement. The 'Mech remained mothballed until her death, whereupon it was willed to her grandson Frederick Marik, in hopes it might inspire him to champion a worthy cause.

However, Frederick has been content to leave his grandmother's 'Mech in storage, for he cannot abide the constant reminder of her bygone achievements and the past glories of House Marik.



ALYS ROUSSET-MARIK



POSITION/RANK POLTERGEIST PRECENTOR SIGMA (MANEI DOMINI)

AFFILIATION/UNIT

WORD OF BLAKE

BIRTH YEAR

3039

Precentor Damien Lucille may well have been one of the highest ranked—and least-known—members of the Word of Blake’s Manei Domini in the opening days of the Jihad. Although he was extremely active from the start of the war until the early months of 3069, only fragmentary records have been found about this elite warrior. These reports and anecdotes paint Lucille as a protégé of Precentor Domini Apollyon himself, despite the fact that he had yet to complete the ascension rite.

Heavily modified with advanced prosthetic limbs, eyes, and a neural interface that enabled him to operate both battle armor and BattleMechs as though they were an extension of his own body, Damien Lucille carried the rank and title of a Sigma-level Precentor Poltergeist. This marked him as a special operative answerable only to Apollyon himself in the Domini chain of command, equivalent of the commander of a Blake’s Wrath division in ComStar’s ROM. Battlefield sightings of Lucille showed him to be equally proficient in armored infantry combat

and ‘Mech warfare, though he generally favored the former when commanding mixed formations of the two. He was also adept at fighting in deep space and microgravity, with several brutal boarding operations to his credit.

Damien Lucille was likely born on Jardine, one of ComStar’s storied “Hidden” worlds, sometime around the War of 3039, but the nature of his origins and the modifications he received as a Domini made such things nigh-impossible to ascertain. Being raised, trained, and enhanced in a secretive community run by the Order’s most devoted adherents, his zealotry was only natural, and he fought for the Word of Blake’s hidden Master without mercy, remorse, or second thoughts. Operating alongside elements of the elite Opacus and the Second Word of Blake Militia, he took part in the first raid against Donegal soon after the opening volleys of the Jihad, and turned up months later on Coventry, where he aided the local occupation forces in hunting down and exterminating Lyran resistance cells. While he was seen in most of these actions sporting the ominous red-to-black color fade of the Word’s Fifty-second Shadow Division, Damien never appeared on the Division’s full roster. Indeed, he was already gone by the time Inner Sphere intel agencies even confirmed the Fifty-second’s existence in late 3069.

Perhaps the best-known incident in which Damien Lucille played a major role was the death of Sir Paul Masters of the Free Worlds League’s Knights of the Inner Sphere, on Helm. Having left his post on the Lyran front soon after learning that his liege and Captain-General was not the Thomas Marik that Masters believed him to be—not to mention also witnessing videos of his fellow Knights’ horrific demise from a Blakist gas attack on Atreus—Sir Masters and Lucille crossed paths over the world of Nestor. Labeling Masters a traitor, Lucille chased him to the world of Helm. Although Masters attempted to hide in the planet’s cold wilderness, Damien’s threat to raze the planetary capital of Helmdown forced him into a fierce duel among the city’s outskirts, where the Knight was brutally slain.

Two months after his victory on Helm, Lucille reportedly turned up on Moore, around the same time the planet was being invaded by other Word of Blake forces including the Twenty-second Militia and the Opacus Venatori. Little is known about his specific actions there, but circumstantial evidence discovered years later suggest that Lucille perished in the infamous Day of Fire incident that soon followed, when an explosion in the swamplands near the planetary capital of Shizuoka triggered a runaway conflagration that consumed the city and spread across much of the surrounding continent.

GRF-3M *GRIFFIN*

POWER PLANT	HERMES 275 XL	MASS	55 TONS	CRUISING SPEED	54 KPH
COMM SYSTEM	NEIL 6000	CHASSIS	EARTHWERKS GRF	MAXIMUM SPEED	86 KPH
T&T SYSTEM	OCTAGON TARTRAC SYSTEM C	ARMAMENT	1 FUSIGON LONGTOOTH EXTENDED-RANGE PARTICLE PROJECTION CANNON	JUMP JETS	RAWLINGS 55
ARMOR	STARSHIELD A WITH CASE		1 DOOMBUD LONG RANGE MISSILE 20-RACK 1 CHRISCOMP SMALL LASER	JUMP CAPACITY	150 METERS

By all accounts, the *Griffin* Damien Lucille piloted during various actions on Donegal, Coventry, Helm, and Moore was a standard GRF-3M variant, likely built at the Earthwerks factories on Keystone sometime after 3052. Its only known modification was to its cockpit systems, which were adapted for use by MechWarriors using a vehicular direct-neural interface system.

Based on similar concepts tested by the NAIS during the early years of the Clan Invasion, the Word's VDNI was a more advanced means of establishing a warrior-to-machine connection without the reduced reaction times inherent to physical controls and hand-eye coordination. Adaptable enough for use not only in 'Mechs and battlesuits, but also quadrupeds, conventional vehicles, and aerospace fighters, these systems were as effective as they were dangerous to their users, akin to the Enhanced Imaging technology used by some of the Clans' more aggressive MechWarriors and Elementals. The unparalleled skill, flexibility, and battlefield acuity the pilot gained when using such equipment was countered by the sensory feedback that usually translated damage to the vehicle into damage to the pilot's brain. While buffers and chemicals could mute these effects, few VDNI users could last more than a decade or so without suffering long-term effects.

Lucille's enhanced prowess with his *Griffin* was readily apparent in every battle in which he took part, and was especially apparent in the lifelike grace and fluidity he demonstrated during close combat against enemy 'Mechs on Coventry and Helm. This edge made it possible for him to outmaneuver even veteran warriors like Sir Paul Masters, whose *Phoenix Hawk* he ultimately dispatched in melee combat.

How exactly Lucille's *Griffin* met its end on Moore is unclear, but when its remains were eventually recovered from the scorched swamps years after the war, the 'Mech showed battle damage consistent with a fight not unlike his duel with Masters on Helm.



DAMIEN LUCILLE [LUCIFER]

THE DARK

KAGE ERA

DUTIES AND OBLIGATIONS

TARA CAMPBELL

HCT - 5D HATCHETMAN | DÒRLACH

ANASTASIA KERENSKY

SAVAGE WOLF [PRIME] | OMEGA

MALVINA HAZEN

SHRIKE 2 [MODIFIED] | BLACK ROSE

JONAH LEVIN

ATLAS C2 | SOLITUDE



DUTIES AND OBLIGATIONS

BLAINE LEE PARDOE

THE REPUBLIC SPIRE, GELLEN'S HEIGHTS

SHERATAN

PREFECTURE IV, REPUBLIC OF THE SPHERE

30 OCTOBER 3135

Tara Campbell stepped into the office of Legate Chang Lau and soaked in the affluence. Sheratan was not a rich world by any means, but one would never have guessed by looking at the Legate's office. The intricate, wood-inlaid floor was the most detailed she had ever seen. The desk, hand-carved gopherwood, perfectly polished with a massive dark top was more befitting a king than a planetary legate. Outside, the setting orange dwarf star shimmered in the purple sky.

Tara resented such ostentatious opulence.

Chang Lau rose from his thick maroon leather chair and flashed her a smile that smacked of a politician campaigning. "Countess Campbell, I am honored to receive you as a visitor."

Tara's gaze swept the bookshelves and the plush draperies, then finally settled on Lau. She was not tall, but her slender frame often made her look taller—certainly her gray dress uniform helped. She wore a kilt of green, blue, and black—the tartan of Clan Campbell—complete with a sash that draped across her lithe body. The sword of a Knight of the Sphere hung at her side. For some it was ceremonial, a part of the uniform; for Tara, it was a weapon, plain and simple.

"I appreciate your willingness to meet with me," she said as an aide closed the door behind them, giving them the privacy she desired.

"Please," Lau said, gesturing to a chair opposite of his own. "Take a seat. I will arrange for tea."

She waved her hand dismissively. "I'm afraid I don't have time for such pleasantries. I am here for Scrimshaw."

The mention of the secret armament depot washed the joy from Lau's face, making him hesitate in the act of sitting down. "Those arms and munitions are for the defense of Sheratan. Why would you take them, if I may ask?"

"I am taking possession of Scrimshaw for relocation to another Republic world. I require the cooperation of your local garrison commander to provide security during the loading of the DropShips, which are landing in a few hours."

Lau lowered himself into his seat slowly, carefully. "This is highly irregular, if not improper," he said with a hint of irritation. He gestured to the chair. "Please, sit."

Tara glanced at it, but remained standing. "We live in times where irregularities are commonplace," she said. "Nevertheless, I am assuming control of Scrimshaw. Will you comply with my request for assistance?"

The legate paused for a moment in thought, narrowing his eyes as if concentrating. "You must understand, this is most unusual. Again, this stockpile of munitions and equipment is for the defense of Sheratan. I am...*uncomfortable*...with you simply taking it."

"It is for the defense of the *Republic*," she countered. "Of which Sheratan is a part."

"Yes, but still, if you remove this cache, we are left naked, ripe for some invader to plunder."

"You are not 'naked,'" she replied. "You have a planetary garrison and militia, all of which are armed and stocked from their own bunkers and bases. Scrimshaw is a strategic reserve stockpile, and it *will* be relocated."

"I would prefer confirmation, Countess. While I trust you, of course, there have been Knights who have betrayed their oaths. We do not have a working HPG, but I can send a JumpShip courier to Terra. Once I get word from Exarch Levin, I will gladly comply."

Tara shook her head. "Impossible, Legate. First, my orders come from Exarch Levin," she reached into her sporran and pulled out a folded copy of the orders and handed it to Lau, who slowly opened and read it. "Second, the Exarch has enacted Fortress Republic. Any ship attempting to jump through the barrier will be destroyed."

The legate's mouth slowly gaped open with the news. "That technology does not exist...it cannot."

"It does, and it works. If you don't believe me, you're welcome to test it, if you have a JumpShip to spare. Given their rarity, I wouldn't risk it, but perhaps you feel differently. I will warn you though—I wouldn't make the attempt myself. I've seen footage of what the Fortress system can do."

The Exarch had shown her the holovids of the ships that had tried to pierce the barrier during testing. Ships twisted and warped, turned inside out—including their crews. It was both a formidable defense and a curse.

Jonah Levin had asked her to travel outside of the barrier before it was activated. She had challenged the assignment, asking if she were being punished. "My place is with my Highlanders!" she had argued at the time.

The Exarch assured Tara that her mission was not only necessary, but critical for the security of the Republic. Still, it pained her to not be with her people...*where I belong*. She had come with only a command lance of devoted Highlanders.

It was a tightrope Tara had walked for years—duty to the Republic balanced against duty to the Northwind

Highlanders. Until now, she had successfully navigated the twists and turns during the collapse of the Republic. In the wake of the HPG blackout that had taken out eighty percent of interstellar communications came war. Everyone saw the planets of the Republic as a potential feast of resources, ripe for the picking. The Clans, seemingly dormant for years, had rearmed quickly—as had the lords of the Great Houses. Ages-old squabbles and vendettas resurfaced, and all seemed to see the Republic of the Sphere as an easy target of conquest. *And now we have built a technological wall around the heart of our realm.* Those worlds on the inside of the barrier were safe—at least for the time being. They could arm and prepare for the onslaught that was sure to come. Those on the outside, like Sheratan, were left to fend for themselves.

Her words of warning to the Legate seemed to have the desired effect as the color drained from his face and he rested his elbows on the beautiful desk. "Why were we not offered protection inside this barrier?"

"I don't know," she said truthfully. "All that I do know is that the material of Scrimshaw are to be relocated under my supervision."

The almost lost expression on his face hardened, turning to anger and frustration. "As I said, this is highly irregular," he fumed, stroking his black goatee in thought.

"You have seen my orders," she said. "Your cooperation is expected." There was a firmness in her voice that conveyed she was not making a request, but a statement of fact.

"Very well, Countess. Let it never be said that I am anything less than a supporter of the Republic. If you wish the contents of Scrimshaw, you shall have them. I however, need my garrison forces in place and under my personal command. If word were to leak that you are taking our stockpile, it might draw unintended attention."

"If that is the case," Tara countered, "having them with me at Scrimshaw would seem the most prudent move."

"From your perspective, yes," Legate Lau replied. "You have your responsibilities, and I have mine. You are welcome to talk to the local militia commanders

to see if they will assist you, but the garrison forces will not."

Tara lowered her head to glare at him. She could feel the loyalty he claimed he possessed seeping away with every beat of his heart. "Very well, legate. Thank you," she replied, turning and walking to the door. *He is far too agreeable. Experience has taught me that such men are compliant only if there is something in it for them.*

As she opened the door, she saw Captain Darcie Boyd standing in her dress Highlander attire, waiting for her. The captain fell into step beside her as they headed to the elevator. "So, Countess, what is the word?" she asked, her Northwind-Scottish accent heavier than usual.

Tara, who usually avoided her accent, let it go as the elevator door closed. "I'm afraid my gut tells me we need to move and move quick."

"No, Countess," Darcie replied, a firm grin rising to her pale face. "You've never been afraid. That's part of your charm."

SCRIMSHAW MUNITIONS CACHE

SHERATAN

PREFECTURE IV, REPUBLIC OF THE SPHERE

31 OCTOBER 3135

From a distance, Scrimshaw looked like a large, grass-covered hill, one of many in the kilometers that surrounded it. Nestled roughly 100 kilometers from the capital city, it looked wholly unremarkable, a large treeless mound with a few rundown old buildings dotting it. They were camouflage for ventilation systems. The entrance to the complex was through what looked to be a barn-like structure, which led to a ramp downward to the tunnels below.

Campbell had sensed the nervousness and tension from the legate, so she'd opted to ground her eight DropShips at the site rather than transport the materiel to the spaceport, where it would be exposed. She had attempted to reach out to the legate to smooth matters over several times, but was told he was unavailable. The brush-off alerted her warrior's intuition. *I am a prefect, I outrank him, yet he refuses*

to speak with me. Combined with his attitude yesterday, I must assume he is planning something.

The only militia commander that answered her directly was Colonel Chris York of the reformed Sheratan Knights. He arrived with his command lance, piloting an old *Warhawk C*, a battered relic of the Clan invasion. Painted crimson with diagonal streaks of bright yellow, it bore the insignia of the Sheratan Knights, a stylized mounted knight that was not a man, but a *Black Knight* 'Mech astride a metallic horse, lance extended. He executed a salute with the *Warhawk's* massive arm in front of her *Hatchetman*, then climbed down. She did the same to meet with him.

"Thank you for coming, Colonel York," she said, extending her hand.

He gripped it tightly and shook it once. "It isn't every day that I have a prefect asking me to assist her, especially one with your, dare I say, reputation." He flashed a smile. "Legate Lau contacted me, then you—each giving conflicting orders."

"And you came."

He nodded. "Fairly simple. You outrank him."

"What were his orders?" Tara pressed.

"He wanted my force to fold in under his control. I am a bit old school when it comes to the chain of command, so I followed your orders instead."

Tara was still sizing him up, but liked what she heard so far. It was always encouraging to hear a commander that understood the way of things and could think for himself. "Let me ask you Colonel, are you loyal to the Republic, or to Sheratan?"

York didn't hesitate. "I never thought they were anything other than one and the same."

The exact right answer. "Very well. I am under orders to remove the contents of Scrimshaw. I have a lance of Northwind's best with me. I need your unit to provide us with security if the legate decides to impede or disrupt our activities."

Colonel York tipped his head slightly to the right. "A command lance of Highlanders?"

"Yes."

"Well..." His smile flashed again. "That should be equal to about a company of normal troops." Tara grinned at his compliment. "I have a company and a half of BattleMechs, a company of armor, and a company of infantry."

"And the planetary garrison?"

"Colonel Osborne commands an entire regiment. It is scattered across the planet, but he can mobilize them fairly fast. And 'Jumping Hugh' Osborne will follow the legate's orders—his wife is Lau's sister."

Tara rolled her eyes at that new nugget of information. "I am hopeful that will be no confrontation. Only our enemies benefit from Republic forces fighting each other."

"Agreed, but the Republic's been losing ground since the HPG blackout. There's a growing mentality with a lot of folks that it's every man or woman for themselves. That kind of thinking can cloud a leader's decisions. Lau tried to lure me to him saying that what is in Scrimshaw is vital to the defense of Sheratan. The people, if fed this by the media, will side with him."

York is clearly wiser than the man he reports to. Tara nodded. "Very well. We need to set up a defensive perimeter. How soon can your forces get here?"

"They are en route right now. Two, maybe three hours. I came ahead to get the lay of the land."

"Let's mount up and let the ground crews start loading. We have a lot of preparation to do." She turned back to her gray-green and crimson-trimmed *Hatchetman*, and started up the handholds to the cockpit. *Thank God at least one man on this planet knows his duty to the Republic!*

SCRIMSHAW MUNITIONS CACHE

SHERATAN

PREFECTURE IV, REPUBLIC OF THE SPHERE

31 OCTOBER 3135

The Sheratan Knights were like a lot of Republic units, a hodge-podge of hardware. The Republic had instituted a disarmament program soon after its formation. Some families resisted the buy-back

program, and local legates were allowed to field garrison forces and militias—which allowed some weapons of war to remain.

At the time, the program had been hailed as a great peace initiative, and Tara, along with many others, had embraced it in her youth. The last few years, however, had shown a flaw in the thinking. It had left many of the worlds of the Republic vulnerable, easy pickings for any faction that had sufficient armaments. *We all want peace—we crave it—but generations of war have taught us to live in conflict.*

As she looked at one lance of the Knights, she saw Industrial 'Mechs that had been converted for battle. One Forestry 'Mech had been painted menacingly with a growling face around the cockpit. Its massive chainsaw was poised to slice into a 'Mech, but its now-armored torso looked embarrassingly exposed and thin. *What were we thinking, to bow so low as to cannibalize our tools of industry to make them weapons of war?* Campbell caught herself. *We were doing what we had to do to survive.*

The plan she and Colonel York had developed was simple. The DropShips were the anchor point at the opening of the Scrimshaw cache. Half of the ones she'd brought were civilian vessels, unarmed. The other four were old, beat-up military vessels with turrets that could lay down a wave of carnage if engaged. Protecting the civilian transports was critical, so they were positioned in the center, surrounded by the military DropShips.

The hills provided far too much cover for an approaching force. Colonel York's infantry was deployed mostly as scouts hiding on hilltops, scanning for any potential threats. Around the DropShips in concentric rings were the armored fighting vehicles and BattleMechs. The rest of the infantry was furiously digging trenches—dangerous defenses against charging 'Mechs and tanks—but all that was left to them. The armor and BattleMechs under her command were fanned out, using the hills for cover.

Tara twisted the torso of her *Hatchetman* around to survey the defenses. *We are outnumbered and outgunned.* The plan was to engage the approaching enemy and begin a slow fallback to the DropShips, which could help even the odds with their turrets. If

the entire planetary garrison was thrown at them, it would be a bloody affair for both sides. It was possible to fall back onto the DropShips and depart, but retreat was not one of Tara Campbell's options. She had done it before, and each time it felt like she'd left a part of her soul behind on the ground she'd been forced to give up.

As she noted a Hetzer assault gun wheeling into position, her comm system cackled to life in her neurohelmet. "This is Scout Four—we have incoming forces from the north, sector four. At least two battalions of armor and ground troops."

Tara pulled up her display and noted the sector. "Roger that, Scout Four. Paint targets and relay the data to us here."

The 'Mechs were a mix of old tech and new. The armor was mostly surplus and captured arms from the Jihad-era, old but potent. "Colonel York, which one is Colonel Osborne?"

There was a pause, and then York's voice came back. "He's the one in the light green *Griffin IIC*."

Tara tagged it on her tactical display and opened one of the non-secured communications channels, one both sides would pick up. "Colonel Osborne, this is Countess Tara Campbell of the RAF. What are your intentions?"

"I *intend* to secure the contents of Scrimshaw," he said gruffly.

"Colonel, these resources are the property of the Republic. The Exarch himself has ordered them relocated. Please stand down and let us do our job."

"My orders come from Legate Lau," he said defiantly. "You need to back off, little lady. We outnumber you by quite a bit. You have a fine reputation, but you're a long ways from your Highlanders here. And Chris, since I know you can hear this, you and the Knights are ordered to stand down as well. You're in enough shit as it is."

Before Colonel York could respond, Tara did. "I shouldn't have to remind you that I am a prefect. That outranks a legate, colonel. You come at me, you are firing on Republic forces."

"You ain't our prefect. Last I heard, your jurisdiction was Prefecture III."

"Colonel," she said steeling the flash of anger that rose to her cheeks. "You don't want to do this."

"You're right. I have to."

"For the rest of you, know this. Anyone that stands down will be spared the justice of the Republic for what is about to happen."

"Up your kilt," Colonel Osborne's deep voice said. "In twenty minutes, this will all be over."

Tara switched to her command channel. "All right, people. You heard...I tried to talk him out of this. Do your duty. I will try to end this with a minimal loss of life." She then toggled over to her command lance of Northwind Highlanders. "Captain Boyd?"

"Aye, Countess."

"Viper protocol. *Griffin IIC*."

"Aye, Viper it is." The sound of Darcie Boyd's rolling Scottish "r" in Viper was almost music in her ears.

The rumble in the distance came as the garrison forces roared over a hill in the distance. There was no presence or hint of strategy other than a blind charge. No doubt Osborne wanted to simply end the fight as quickly as possible with an all-out assault.

The air quickly filled with long-range missiles plumes and the flash of PPCs cracking and hissing in the air. Tara shifted position as a fast moving green Giggins APC sped into range and screeched to a halt to disgorge its infantry. She locked onto it and unleashed a salvo of autocannon fire that destroyed the passenger side front tire, blowing it into pieces that rained down on the garrison infantry. It tried to speed away, but ground into the sod, where waves of missiles slammed into it. The Giggins exploded a moment later.

A *Wasp* rushed forward and hit her *Hatchetman* with a crimson laser beam that scored down its right thigh. A lone short-range missile blasted her center torso as the *Wasp* spun off to the left. Tara's medium lasers both hit its right arm, melting hot blobs of crimson armor away as it tried to run. Boyd's *Osprey* sent a Gauss rifle round into the same limb, passing through it and into the torso with such force that the *Wasp* careened over, nearly falling, its arm holding on by a few brave myomer strands.

She saw the militia *ForestryMech's* chainsaw shred armor off a fast-moving garrison force *Phoenix Hawk* that retaliated by ripping that arm off in a single salvo of laser fire. Explosions and flashes of laser light filled the air as the militia forces tried to hold their ground. *We can't last long in this kind of fight.*

A wave of long-range missiles washed across Tara's *Hatchetman*, the explosions rocking her hard as bits of blown-off armor became flying shrapnel. A last-minute shuffle of her position prevented even more damage as she broke into a run.

"All units, retrograde one!" she commanded. Around her, the defending forces began to fall back. "Boyd, you are go for Viper," she said, firing a stream of autocannon rounds into a Pegasus hovercraft, destroying a piece of its flank skirting and sending it away from her position. *Take out the head of the snake.*

There was no verbal confirmation—none was needed. The three Northwind Highlander BattleMechs, an *Osprey*, a *Lancelot*, and a *Panther*, charged forward as one—heading right for the distant green *Griffin IIC* piloted by Colonel Osborne. A Demon tank tried to interpose itself between them, but was destroyed as all three poured fire into it.

Tara sprinted in pursuit of her fellow Highlanders as a PPC burst narrowly missed her, its azure flash passing far too close to her cockpit.

Colonel Osborne and a Demolisher tank tore into Captain Boyd's *Osprey*, blasting the right leg into melted and torn bits in a barrage of autocannon and laser fire. Darcie nearly toppled as the *Lancelot*, piloted by Sergeant-Major McClane, melted glowing hot scars on the *Griffin IIC's* shoulder. Osborne spun around fast as he realized they were targeting him specifically.

Missiles and autocannon shells tore into Tara as she closed the gap. The *Griffin IIC* blasted the *Osprey* with its laser again, slicing into the 'Mech's center torso. Bits of armor rained onto the green grass, hissing as they landed.

Colonel Osborne never saw Tara coming as he attempted to fend off an attack by the *Panther* piloted by Tara's other lancemate, Corporal Wallace. She raised her 'Mech's namesake hatchet over her head

and drove it down hard, right into the side of the cockpit of the *Griffin IIC*. It chopped deep, shattering the armored ferroglass and cutting through the armor there right into the gyro. She hadn't hit Osborne directly, but he was thrown hard against the canopy, and his *Griffin IIC* swayed, then fell with a dull thud.

She hit the open comms channel as she turned and planted a kick into the side of the Demolisher tank as it blew off Captain Boyd's damaged leg, sending her falling hard only a few meters way. "This is Prefect Tara Campbell to the garrison forces. Your CO is down. Stand down now or share his fate!"

The concussion of explosions around her seemed to waver, then stopped, as did the rumble of ammunition-fed thunder. These were garrison troops—weekend warriors, unwilling to die for a cause they weren't committed to. Tara pursed her lips and blew a long breath of air out. *Thank God!*

"You did it!" came the voice of Colonel York. His *Warhawk* was showing as downed, but he clearly was still alive.

"No, we did it," Tara replied. "And there's nothing to rejoice in. The last thing the Republic needs is to be fighting itself." *Especially now.*

Tara popped the faceplate of her neurohelmet, then sagged in the command couch for a moment. She looked down at the smashed remains of Osborne's *Griffin IIC* and winced. This was not the way to fight—not the way to win—but it was all she had.

The realization of what had just happened crashed down on her. *I'm alone out here, beyond the wall. I didn't ask for this fight, or the ones to come...but I will do what needs to be done to save the Republic, and the honor it stands for.*

Even if the cost is my mortal soul...





POSITION/RANK	LEGATE, PREFECT (REPUBLIC OF THE SPHERE); COUNTESS OF NORTHWIND; PALADIN (REPUBLIC REMNANT)
AFFILIATION/UNIT	REPUBLIC OF THE SPHERE; NORTHWIND HIGHLANDERS; REPUBLIC REMNANT
BIRTH YEAR	3104

Born on Terra to Highlander Colonel Jon Campbell and Republic Senator Moelene Jaffries-Campbell, Tara spent her early life shuttling between the Republic capital and the family estates on Northwind. Photogenic and well connected, she joined the Republic's Diplomatic Youth Corps in 3110 and recorded inspirational messages for the RAF during the Capellan Crusades. She enrolled in the MechWarrior Academy of Northwind in 3121 and led its cadet corps by 3124. After serving in the First Kearny, she accepted the post of legate of Northwind in 3129, assuming the title of countess that same year.

Growing up in the public spotlight, and earning fame both as a warrior and a fashion icon, Tara understood how to seize the media's attention and use it to her advantage. She regularly called upon all sides in disputes to be better, though she proved able to instantly shift from diplomat and mediator to warrior as the situation demanded.

When Katana Tormark resigned as the leader of Prefecture III in 3132, Tara assumed the role of prefect as well, engaging in spirited political disputes. The time for talk ended on Gray Monday, and the young countess was horrified by how quickly the common people embraced fear and aggression, casting aside the ideals and prosperity of the Republic of the Sphere. Though she successfully rallied her people to defend Northwind from attack, she felt responsibility for every Republic citizen in her Prefecture. When she departed to defend Terra from the Steel Wolves, she left her fellow Highlanders with the promise, "While we must answer the call to our honor, we will never forget our friends and loved ones here on Northwind. Should we ever be needed, we shall be here..."

She summoned Republic loyalists to her banner and fought across numerous worlds to hold Stone's Great Experiment together until help could arrive, supporting RAF and Standing Guard troops against bandits that sought advantage in the chaos of the Blackout. When the Jade Falcon *desant* fell upon Skye, she went to its rescue, but was ultimately driven off. Called to Terra for the funeral of Paladin Victor Steiner-Davion, she was caught up in the Senate Rebellion, and again proved herself a staunch ally of the Republic.

Assigned by Exarch Levin to secure an arms depot on Sheratan in 3135, she was cut off from all but a small contingent of her Highlanders when the Fortress Wall went up. Having taken command of the local loyalist militia and given leadership to RAF troops who refused the Fortress Republic recall order, she stood as a last line of defense against the encroaching Great Houses and Clans. In dire need of allies, she joined with Exarch Damien Redburn's Republic Remnant and took command of its forces, forging them into an effective army that successfully held Galatea in 3144.

When Jonah Levin himself came to recall Tara and the other Remnant leaders to the defense of the Republic, she refused and pledged her loyalty to Redburn, but ultimately agreed to return at the head of her Highlanders to safeguard Terra against the expected Wolf Empire attack. However, when word came in late 3150 that Northwind was under assault by Capellan forces, she recalled her promise and departed Terra with Devlin Stone's blessing.

Amid a cacophony of war pipes, Countess Tara Campbell announced her return to her homeworld after more than fifteen years away, slamming into the flanks of McCarron's Armored Cavalry as they laid siege to the planetary defense headquarters at the Castle. She drove her foes from her world and once again ensured that the Highlander banner flew proudly above a free Northwind.

HCT-5D *HATCHETMAN*

DÓRLACH

POWER PLANT	GM 180 XL	MASS	45 TONS	CRUISING SPEED	43 KPH
COMM SYSTEM	THARHES THALIA HM-22	CHASSIS	DORWINION HCT STANDARD	MAXIMUM SPEED	64 KPH
T&T SYSTEM	THARHES ARES-8A WITH TARGETING COMPUTER	ARMAMENT	1 IMPERATOR AUTOMATIC ULTRA-10 AUTOCANNON	JUMP JETS	RAWLINGS 80
ARMOR	DURALLEX MEDIUM		1 DEFIANCE B3M EXTENDED-RANGE MEDIUM LASER	JUMP CAPACITY	120 METERS
			1 DEFIANCE TYPE G3 'MECH HATCHET		

A hunch-shouldered, broad-chested brute of a machine hefting a huge, depleted-uranium-edged axe, the countess appreciates her *Hatchetman's* thuggish lack of subtlety. For her preferred close-in and dirty combat style, its capabilities as a heavy-fighting brawler are a perfect match. For ranged combat, it pairs a shoulder-mounted autocannon with an extended-range laser, both slaved to an advanced targeting computer. Tara named her ride *Dòrlach*, Gaelic for “handful,” and set her personal activation code as “*Manus haec inimical tyrannis*” — “This hand is hostile to tyrants.”

Posted with *Dòrlach* to the First Kearny line unit under Colonel Emil Wallace in 3124, Tara became famous as “The Angel of Sadalbari” while battling Black Dragon pirates in 3127, and was subsequently appointed the senior military official on Northwind. When Gray Monday fell, Northwind Legate Campbell found herself in possession of one of the only BattleMechs on the planet.

At *Dòrlach's* controls, she twice drove the Steel Wolves from Northwind and engaged them again on Terra, battling Anastasia Kerensky and the traitorous “Black Paladin” Ezekiel Crow near Belgorod. Her most famous engagement came in 3134 on Skye, when she fought alongside Anastasia against Malvina and Aleksandr Hazen of Clan Jade Falcon. Tara disabled Malvina's *Shrike* with a headshot and, in a final desperate charge, buried her hatchet deep into the cockpit of Aleksandr's *Gyrfalcon*. With Aleksandr's death, the warriors of Zeta Galaxy retreated, but when they returned later in the year, *Dòrlach* was destroyed by a Falcon *Warhammer IIC*.

Tara obtained a factory-fresh -5D *Hatchetman* in 3135 and soon took it into action against the Senatorial Alliance's rebellion. After joining the Republic Remnant, Tara accepted that the increasing intensity of conflict dictated greater protection on the battlefield, and transferred her command seat to *Caber*, a BLR-4S *BattleMaster*.



TARA CAMPBELL

**POSITION/RANK**

STAR COLONEL (CLAN WOLF IN EXILE);
GALAXY COMMANDER (STEEL WOLVES); ALPHA (WOLF HUNTERS);
STAR COLONEL, SAKHAN (WOLF EMPIRE)

AFFILIATION/UNIT

WOLVES-IN-EXILE, STEEL WOLVES,
WOLF HUNTERS, WOLF EMPIRE

BIRTH YEAR

3105

Trueborn into the Clan Wolf-in-Exile enclave on Arc-Royal, Anastasia has worked most of her life to escape the shadow of her genetic progenitor—the infamous Natasha Kerensky. Clearly possessed of Natasha’s skills, she achieved four kills in her Trial of Position, joining the *touman* as a Star Colonel. However, her neo-Crusader agitation for the conquest of Terra made her a misfit in the Warden culture, relegating her to second-line commands. When Sidonia Kerensky fell to the Jade Falcons in 3129, Anastasia fought through a Grand Melee and Trial of Bloodright to win her Bloodname. With the name, however, came a role on the Clan Council, and an increasing number of Trials of Grievance against her politics.

In 3132, following Gray Monday, she adopted the pseudonym of Tassa Kay and set off to find her place in the universe, coming to the rescue of pro-

Republic forces on several worlds. After battling the Crusader-aligned Steel Wolves on Achernar, she traveled to their base on Tigress and fought a Trial of Position to join their ranks. Few trusted her, however, due to her role in their defeat on Achernar, and she was sidelined from Steel Wolves offensives. With typical Clan directness, Anastasia challenged Kal Radick for command of the unit and slew him in hand-to-hand combat.

As Galaxy Commander, Anastasia led the Steel Wolves after major targets such as Northwind and Terra itself, though her reach often exceeded her grasp. It became clear that, rather than trying to seize territory or resources, she was seeking glory by pitting herself against the most challenging foes available, such as Tara Campbell and her Highlanders. For this purpose, she next appeared on Skye to face and defeat Malvina and Aleksandr Hazen’s Jade Falcons, this time fighting alongside Countess Campbell.

After Skye, she brought the Steel Wolves to the mercenary world of Galatea and cast aside those who did not meet her standards, renaming the remaining core as her Wolf Hunters—now an elite mercenary unit rather than a disparate gang of bandits playing at being Clan Wolf. She led her troops to victory on Irian in 3136, and battled the migrating Crusader Wolves and their new Wolf Empire as it expanded to worlds held by her employers, the Lyran Commonwealth.

In 3137, she took Alaric Wolf as her bondsman after becoming the first to defeat him in battle. Having enjoyed the challenge he posed, she initially sought to tear him down psychologically and rebuild him as her apprentice. But, hoping to once again fight him as an enemy, she intentionally let Alaric be recaptured by Clan Wolf on Unukalhai. When they next met, on Smolnik, however, Alaric proved the greater warrior, inducting Anastasia into the Wolf Empire.

Anastasia thrived in the Empire’s Crusader culture and quickly rose to command the Second Wolf Assault Cluster. Appointed Alaric’s saKhan after Garner Kerensky’s disappearance, she summoned the Wolf Hunters to join her in the Empire and, at Alaric’s side, led the Wolves’ invasion of the Republic of the Sphere. On world after world, her troops struck at the RAF defenders precisely and methodically, taking their best as *isorla* to replenish the *touman*.

The desire to fulfill the mandate of Great Founder Nicholas Kerensky, reclaim Terra, and establish a new era of power and honor, has driven Anastasia since her youth on Arc-Royal. Though it made her an outcast among the Wardens, she has finally found a fitting home among the warriors of the Wolf Empire. Khan Alaric has promised her a special role in his campaign to bring the Republic to its knees, and she eagerly anticipates the glorious fighting ahead.

SAVAGE WOLF [PRIME]

OMEGA

POWER PLANT MODEL 49B 375 XXL ENGINE

MASS

75 TONS

CRUISING SPEED

54 KPH

COMM SYSTEM KHAN SERIES (TYPE 6C)

CHASSIS

TYPE W4 ENDO STEEL

MAXIMUM SPEED

86 KPH

T&T SYSTEM

SERIES XIV OPT

ARMAMENT 2 TYPE 22 EXTENDED-RANGE PPC

JUMP JETS

NONE

ARMOR COMPOSITE ALPHA-V1 FERRO-LAMELLOR

4 SMARTSHOT MK. VI STREAK SRM 6

JUMP CAPACITY

NONE

It has been said that Anastasia changes her BattleMech as often as her name or personality. First spotted in the Republic with a customized *Ryoken II*, she switched to an LGN-2X *Legionnaire* when the former was crippled in battle. With the Steel Wolves, she piloted an *Mangonel* she dubbed *Alpha*. When she formed the Wolf Hunters in 3136, she obtained one of the first production models of the new *Mad Cat Mk IV*—a *Savage Wolf*—from Clan Sea Fox. In gunmetal gray with a red cockpit and a

matching red paw print on the chest, it bore a red Alpha symbol (for Anastasia) on its right leg, while its left showcased its own designation—*Omega*.

Anastasia defeated Clan Wolf *ristar* Alaric Wolf in *Omega* on Yed Posterior in 3137, temporarily taking him as her bondsman. In 3141, on Hyde, Anastasia pitted *Omega* against her former comrade Verena. Though outmassed and outgunned by Verena's *Jupiter*, Anastasia used her knowledge of Verena's fighting style to maneuver her opponent into position to deliver a lethal strike to Verena's cockpit. She attempted the same tactic against Alaric on Smolnik in 3143, but he anticipated her assault and brought down *Omega*, taking Anastasia as his bondswoman.

Within Alaric's Wolf Empire, Anastasia pressed forward the Empire's ongoing assault against the Republic at *Omega's* helm. At the Battle of Port Wyvern on Wing, Anastasia bid fiercely and won the right to battle RAF commander Paladin Max Ergen and his X Hastati Sentinels, using guile to bring down his *Doloire* in a Circle of Equals on the snow-covered Drake Rimelands.

Anastasia's greatest desire is to test her prowess against renowned warriors such as Countess Tara Campbell of the Highlanders and Chinggis Khan Malvina Hazen, winning glory in their defeat. When they lie at *Omega's* feet, honor will be satisfied.



ANASTASIA KERENSKY



POSITION/RANK	KHAN
AFFILIATION/UNIT	CLAN JADE FALCON
BIRTH YEAR	3103

A product of the Emerald Dawn *sibko*, Malvina's Falcons quickly identified her sociopathic tendencies, lack of empathy, and disinterest in moral considerations. Falconer Kitazawa became her mentor, determined to create a new breed of warrior capable of utter ruthlessness in the pursuit of victory. Under his guidance, she became the purest expression of the Jade Falcon creed—strength is synonymous with honor, so anything less than maximum force shames the Clan. To her, deaths were simply the necessary culling of the unworthy, allowing the strong to ascend, and she never let an opportunity to eliminate a rival pass her by.

Kitazawa considered her closest *sibmate*, Aleksandr, to be the key to helping her rein in her violent instincts. When Kitazawa was killed by rioting civilian caste members during a planetary famine, Malvina opened fire into the crowd and harbored disdain for lower caste “bellycrawlers” thereafter. As an unblooded Star Captain, she ordered the deaths of five thousand civilians during a labor mutiny, earning prestige with the Mongol movement as “The Butcher of Wotan.”

A *ristar* in the Clan, Malvina considered the Blackout to be an omen and called for a renewed drive on Terra. To rid herself of troublemakers from the aggressive Slip movement, Khan Jana Pryde authorized Malvina, Aleksandr, and Beckett Malthus to lead three *Galaxies* in a *desant*, conquering worlds on a path to Terra. Putting her Mongol philosophy into practice, Malvina unleashed terror tactics to shatter the will of complacent foes who had lived under the Pax Republica for generations. She ordered the execution of thousands on Ryde to discourage resistance and deployed tactical nuclear weapons against the Steel Wolves on Glengarry. In the end, however, her *desant* was blunted with a crushing defeat on Skye, leaving Malvina wounded and alone in the wake of Aleks's death.

No longer constrained by her *sibkin's* influence, Malvina blamed Khan Pryde for his death, citing her failure to dispatch reinforcements. Calling herself the Chingis Khan (universal ruler), Malvina challenged Jana to a Trial of Possession for Clan Jade Falcon. When Pryde's loyalists attempted to assassinate her, Malvina prevailed and converted the threat into an opportunity to launch an open rebellion, leading her Slips against the more conservative Jesses in the Rending, a seven-month struggle that culminated in her victory over Pryde in hand-to-hand combat on the hull of the WarShip *Emerald Talon* over Sudeten. To cement her rule, she then deorbited the *Talon*, crashing it into the Falcon's Perch tower and eliminating most of the Clan's leadership structure.

As Khan, Malvina brutally purged the remaining Jesses and built popular support by allowing *sibko* washouts and civilian caste members to take Trials of Position. Malvina hurled these fresh troops, her Golden Ordun, into the power vacuum created by the Wolf migration. She continued her war of expansion into the Lyran Commonwealth, reaching as far as its throneworld of Tharkad and the key industrial centers of Coventry and Hesperus II. She brooked no resistance, irradiating the water supply on the desert world of Apostica when civilians attacked her garrison, thereby terrifying other Lyran worlds into surrendering without firing a shot. Betrayed by her saKhan, Beckett Malthus, she survived and slew him in a Trial mere weeks after emerging from a coma.

Of all the Clans, she considers her Falcons to have held closest to Kerensky's vision—the only ones strong enough to do so. She calls upon her warriors to find power in adversity and prove their courage and relentlessness as they burn a path to Terra, where the injustice of history will finally be set right by her hand.

SHRIKE 2 [MODIFIED]

POWER PLANT	OLIVETTI 380 XL
COMM SYSTEM	RAPTOR X-T TYPE III
T&T SYSTEM	GOSHAWK E-SERIES WITH TARGETING COMPUTER
ARMOR	JF STANDARD

MASS	95 TONS
CHASSIS	DSAM ENDO 4
ARMAMENT	2 TYPE XX EXTENDED-RANGE PPC 1 TYPE X "LONG BOW" LRM 10-RACK 2 SERIES 2B ER MEDIUM LASERS

BLACK ROSE

CRUISING SPEED	43 KPH
MAXIMUM SPEED	64 KPH
JUMP JETS	GRANDTHRUST MK 5
JUMP CAPACITY	150 METERS WITH PARTIAL WING

Malvina first encountered her chosen BattleMech when she faced it in her 3133 Trial of Bloodright. Though her older *Onager* was outclassed by the *Shrike*, Malvina cunningly used the terrain to gain advantage, touching off a prairie fire and maneuvering Star Captain Watkins into the unexpected conflagration. As the *Shrike* burned, she punched through its head, crushing Watkins and claiming the Hazen Bloodname.

To commemorate her victory, she claimed the scorched *Shrike* as *isorla* and named it *Black Rose*. As its code phrase, she chose a passage from the Remembrance: "Let the Falcon take flight in a new generation. Let the stars be its hunting grounds."

Fast for an assault machine, Malvina's BattleMech is painted in the colors of the Turkina Keshik—green with lime highlights. Its emerald cockpit is molded into the hook-beaked shape of a falcon's head, while a jade falcon mural adorns its chest. Its right thigh is marked with the emblem of its name: a dark flower in bloom.

Skye remains the only significant blemish on her codex. In a Trial of Refusal at Skye's northern pole over her use of terror tactics, she faced her *sibkin* Aleksandr's "White Lily" in a one-kilometer Circle of Equals that prevented the lighter *Gyrfalcon* from exploiting its superior speed and range. Instead, he charged directly at her and smashed his way through the ice into a submerged lake beneath her feet. Pushing up from below, he toppled Malvina into the icy waters and knocked her unconscious.

Forced to fight according to Aleksandr's rules of engagement, Malvina found herself brought low by Tara Campbell's *Hatchetman*. A precision autocannon strike breached Black Rose's cockpit, badly injuring her and preventing her from supporting Aleks when he faced both Campbell and Anastasia Kerensky. Malvina has sworn vengeance against both for taking him from her.





POSITION/RANK	PALADIN, EXARCH
AFFILIATION/UNIT	REPUBLIC OF THE SPHERE
BIRTH YEAR	3082

Born on Hesperus II, Jonah developed an affinity for BattleMechs at his uncle's component factory. He immigrated to Kervil with his family at age ten, and earned his Republic citizenship by eighteen. Becoming a MechWarrior, he earned a position in the Kyrkbacken militia, where he rose to the rank of Captain. As tensions rose prior to the outbreak of the Capellan Crusades, Levin achieved distinction battling a reconstituted Warrior House Ma Tsu Kai during RAF recovery operations on Kurragin in 3110. For his bravery, the Council of Paladins made him a Knight of the Sphere. Attached to the IV Hastati Sentinels, Sir Levin fought valiantly to drive the Fourth McCarron's Armored Cavalry from the Valley of the Kings on Foot Fall in 3112.

In his two decades of Knighthood, Sir Jonah was a force to be reckoned with and commanded incredible loyalty among his troops. A proven field commander, he remained calm and resolute in battle, and was not prone to rash action. He preferred to wait for his quarry to relax, then spring to the attack, and was skilled in the use of theatrics to misdirect his

enemies. He far preferred field operations to the feuds, secret alliances and hidden agendas of Knight-level politics on Terra.

As much as he regarded helping the Republic's people as his life's work, he strictly guarded his privacy and that of his family. He cherished his wife, Anna, and their four children, and missed them terribly when his duties took him away. The family was still grieving the tragic death of their daughter, Yael, when Jonah was chosen to replace Paladin Isabella Druchet in 3132.

The first Jewish Paladin, Jonah swore to uphold the power and authority of the Exarch against all enemies, foreign and domestic, little knowing how all-consuming that oath would soon become. With a reputation for being incorruptible and apolitical, he was tasked by Exarch Damien Redburn with investigating the murder of Paladin Victor Steiner-Davion. He uncovered a decades-long plot by nobles in the Senate to infiltrate the Republic Armed Forces with loyalists and seize control. Having earned the respect of his fellow Paladins by exposing the treachery of the Senatorial Alliance, Jonah was elected Exarch of the Republic in 3134.

Hoping to use Victor's funeral as a turning point and forge alliances to bring the Republic through the Blackout intact, Jonah invited leaders from throughout the Inner Sphere to Terra for Victor's funeral. An uprising by Senatorial loyalist forces, however, usurped his agenda and forced him to focus on containing the military situation.

Facing an internal betrayal and simultaneous invasions by Clan Jade Falcon, the Draconis Combine and the Capellan Confederation, Levin found himself presiding over the Republic's darkest hours, and saw Devlin Stone's dream falling apart around him. Desperate for a silver-bullet solution, he fell back on Stone's contingency plans and, with support from the Council of Paladins, enacted Fortress Republic, using experimental Blakist technology to raise the Fortress Wall that prevented hyperspace travel between the Republic core worlds and the rest of the Inner Sphere.

While opportunistic powers fought over the Republic worlds outside the Wall, Levin worked to rebuild the Republic's military strength and fortify Terra against attack. To keep the Republic's light burning for the future hope of all humankind, Jonah met the challenge with every tool at his disposal—even if they violated his core principles. When Devlin Stone returned from cryosleep, Levin gladly stepped down, becoming Exarch Stone's vizier. In this capacity, he led a mission to bring the Republic Remnant's forces back to Terra, where they stand ready to repulse the Republic's enemies.

ATLAS C2

SOLITUDE

POWER PLANT	VLAR 300	MASS	100 TONS	CRUISING SPEED	32 KPH
COMM SYSTEM	ANGST DISCOM	CHASSIS	FOUNDATION TYPE 10X	MAXIMUM SPEED	54 KPH
T&T SYSTEM	ANGST ACCURACY	ARMAMENT ¹	TYPE J LB 20-X AUTOCANNON	JUMP JETS	NONE
ARMOR	DURALLEX SPECIAL HEAVY	1 TYPE DDS "KINGSTON" EXTENDED-RANGE PPC		JUMP CAPACITY	NONE
		1 TYPE VI STREAK SRM 6 LAUNCHER			
		2 SERIES 7J EXTENDED RANGE LARGE LASERS			
		2 SERIES PPS-XIX MEDIUM PULSE LASERS			

As the First Kyrkbacken Militia's Echo Company commander, Levin piloted an antiquated *Stinger* when he deployed to Kurragin in 3110. Though initially displeased with the poorly maintained 'Mech, after leading a decisive charge against Capellan lines at Prospect Hill, Jonah was proud to call it *Ass-Kicker*...at least until Exarch Devlin Stone jokingly rechristened it *Ass-Kisser*.

Upon elevation to Paladin in 3132, Jonah received a new AS7-K2 *Atlas*, the first in a series of AS7s on which he bestowed the name *Solitude*. When asked about the unusual name, he explained that its cockpit was one of the few places where he could truly be alone with his thoughts. During 3134's Operation Aftershock on Kervil, Paladin Levin led an assault on the Bernhard Island pirate stronghold to capture its leadership and expose the entire criminal network. Deployed offshore by boat, his *Atlas* approached underwater and emerged from the surf undetected to crush the pirate headquarters.

Following his election as Exarch, he was pressured to switch to an *Atlas III*. Despite his protestations that his prior *Atlas* was still almost new, Jonah accepted the new 'Mech, though he retained his former ride's name. When Senate loyalists attempted to overthrow his government in 3135, Levin took to the field in *Solitude*, using the *Atlas III*'s exceptional command capabilities to direct containment operations against Senatorial forces in France.

After the Senate uprising, Jonah transferred his flag to an *Atlas* constructed with ClanTech,

again named *Solitude*. In it, he faced down Republic Remnant leader Damien Redburn on Callison in 3149. When Redburn ended the parlay with a surprise attack on *Solitude*, Levin answered back in kind, savaging his foe's *Black Knight*. The two former Exarchs, once friends and allies, left restraint behind as they fought for their divergent visions of the Republic's future.



JONAH LEVIN

THE ILCI

ALONE TIME

ISOBEL 'BEL' CARLYLE

ABDOUN RICOL

ALARIC WARD

DANAI LIAO-CENTRELLA

PLAN ERA

SHD - 7H SHADOW HAWK | TYCHE

MAD - 7S MARAUDER [MODIFIED] | AKARYŌSHI

SAVAGE WOLF [A] | WEPWAWET

BL - 18 - KNT BLACK KNIGHT | JULIAN

JULIAN DAVION

KISHO NOVA CAT

PETR KALASA

TRENTON MARIK

MAD - 10D MARAUDER II | EXCALIBUR

WENDIGO-VP [PRIME] | NEBULA

HAMMERHEAD | AKITLA

RFL-7N2 RIFLEMAN [MODIFIED] | HABEAS CORPUS



ALONE TIME

JASON SCHMETZER

HELMAND DESERT

HALL

REPUBLIC OF THE SPHERE

13 FEBRUARY 3149

It was stupid, really.

Danai Liao-Centrella, duchess of Castrovia and by the grace of her father, Daoshen Liao, the commander of the Second McCarron's Armored Cavalry, was out in the deserts of Hall all alone.

The other MechWarriors of her Command Lance were nearby, but she'd sent them all away, looking for signs of the Fourteenth Principes Guards. She and her regiment had landed several weeks prior, to take Hall from the Republic of the Sphere and return it to the rule of its ancient masters, the Capellan Confederation.

It was all very noble.

That's what she told herself, before she snorted into her neurohelmet.

There was nothing noble about what she was doing out here.

After a fast clash when the Second MAC had first landed, the Principes had faded into the landscape around Harney and its environs. Every day a new report came in—this patrol or that one struck with an ambush or a raid against a supposedly-secure soft rear target. The Second had had to bring enough consumables, for example, for several months' operations. That largesse had to be doled out to the component battalions and companies doing the hard work of chasing down the Principes until local sources of resupply could be found or follow-on shipments from the Confederation arrived.

That meant supply depots.

Depots means raids against them.

And raids warranted responses, which was why she was out there.

Taking her controls in hand and foot, Danai guided her 50-ton *Centurion*, *Yen-Lo-Wang*, around a rock outcropping hiding the next course of the narrow, stone-sided canyon.

These were the "halls" that Hall was named for, and she didn't even try and imagine the number of battles these old rock walls had seen. She just wanted to get to the final one, the one that would mean the Confederation had retaken Hall, and she could move on to the next task.

Whatever that was.

"Zero Six to Zero," she said, toggling her lance frequency. "Anyone?" Dead air was her only response. Sighing, Danai drew her throttle back and slid a map view across her HUD, trying to guess where the raiders would have gone.

Two hours ago, a force of three 'Mechs and two hover tanks had struck a MAC supply element in movement, destroying a handful of ammo carriers and one very valuable mobile field base. The MFB was a sprawling mobile structure that could take a battle-weary 'Mech into its cradles and return a combat-ready machine in a matter of minutes or hours. Losing it meant two of her companies would have to return all the way to the DropShips for reliable repair facilities. That meant more travel time, and less time out on patrol.

Which meant this whole little parade on Hall would take *longer*.

"Which does not make for a happy Danai," she muttered.

For a moment, she considered turning around. There was every chance that the rest of her lance, or some element of the Second Battalion she'd called up to support them, had already dealt with the raiders, and she just didn't know. If she couldn't call them, then they couldn't call her, either. But in the absence of information, that felt like giving up. She wasn't ready to give up.

Sliding the map away, Danai advanced her throttle and started *Yen-Lo-Wang* moving again. The *Centurion* was unique among its many venerable brethren, modified for dueling in the 'Mech arenas of Solaris VII. She had resisted returning it to a pure combat configuration ever since. As the 'Mech reached its cruising pace the heavy scutum-style shield came up to middle guard, and the large heavy laser opposite was already trained.

This was how she'd stalked Greta von Hansen in the Jungle Arena all those years ago: shield up, laser ready, long-range missiles ready for the coup de grâce when the chance arose. Danai smiled at the memory; it was times like this that she missed those old days, when the most

complicated thing she had to think about was her after-fight interview for Solaris Broadcasting Corporation.

Yen-Lo-Wang's sensors chirped a hesitant new warning as she approached the next turn. Magnetic detectors told her there was a mass of heavy metal coming toward her, but without line of sight she couldn't read the likely BattleMech's IFF. It could be one of her lancemates.

Or it could be one of the Principes.

Danai's smile became a predatory grin. It would be a huge release of stress for her if it were a Principe. The stalker of Cathay's jungles didn't run from a fight. As von Hansen had found out.

The hard way.

Danai backed up a few steps, until she had her back armor to the canyon wall with a clear vector toward the deeper canyon off to her right, if she needed it. She brought the shield up into active defense, crouched slightly, and aimed her heavy laser. Panthers were patient, and so was she.

The other 'Mechs' sensors must not have been so finely tuned as *Yen-Lo-Wang's* were; it strode around the corner as if it didn't have a care in the world. And it may not have, since it was one of the Republic's powerful *Lament* BattleMechs.

Danai squeezed the trigger for her laser as soon as she saw the machine's paint job. Her heavy laser burned harsh scarlet, scoring the *Lament's* belly. The RAF 'Mech lurched even as it twisted to try and find its attacker. *Yen-Lo-Wang's* computer helpfully painted red enemy caretts around the *Lament* in her HUD. Danai licked her lips as heat suffused her 'Mech's cockpit; the laser far outpaced her 'Mech's heat sinks. But there was a reason for that...

Laments were intimidating opponents, all weapons barrels and linebacker legs. Danai had fought them before, on Solaris and elsewhere. She gave the machine a healthy amount of respect, but Solaris was a world that *proved* the MechWarrior inside was far more dangerous than the machine.

The Republic pilot triggered both their big heavy PPCs, but only one struck, wasting not quite half of its energy on *Yen-Lo-Wang's* shield. Danai, with the ease of long practice, rocked with the blow and side-stepped, watching the laser recharge indicator. The bolt had struck high on *Yen-Lo-Wang's* shoulder, punching through with enough force to damage the armor there. Her Clan-made LRMs would do heavy damage, even this close, but she'd have to move the shield and expose her *Centurion* to enemy fire. Against a heavier, more powerful 'Mech—like a 65-ton *Lament*—that was suicide. Her shield would keep her alive long enough to strike the decisive blow.

It always had.

Continuing to move, Danai swung the 'Mech-scale hatchet opposite the shield from side to side, to show the *Lament* it was there. To remind the pilot inside what the future held. It was something she'd begun doing in Solaris, early in her fights. She thought maybe it'd become a signature way to end her matches, something every Solaris gladiator wanted. In the end, her heavy large laser had been much more effective.

The habit stuck anyway.

The laser recharge pinged ready. Danai chose her moment, fainting right and then stepping left. She triggered her laser at the apex of her movement; the bright beam burning ferociously at the *Lament's* armor again. The point where it hit blazed white-hot for a moment. More heat washed through her cockpit; red warning lights blared as the 'Mech's computer began to assert some control, overriding her actions to try and get *Yen-Lo-Wang's* heat burden under control.

One small green light lit on her movement control board. *Yen-Lo-Wang* seemed to shiver with anticipation. Or maybe Danai was projecting her own shiver on the machine.

"Keep up," she told the *Lament*, and shoved her throttle to its stops.

Yen-Lo-Wang accelerated to match the *Lament's* top speed, then passed it. And kept going.

The small green light was an indicator that the heat-activated triple-strength myomers that moved *Yen-Lo-Wang's* limbs had reached their activation point. While she kept her heat burden this high, the 50-ton *Centurion* was as fast as a 30-ton *Spider*.

She hefted the hatchet; the overpowered myomers also meant her hatchet struck as though an *Atlas* was swinging it.

The hall left both MechWarriors little room to maneuver. The *Lament's* pilot, to their credit, recognized right away that their only remaining advantage lay in firepower. They reversed their throttle and tried to keep the range open, both heavy PPCs crackling again.

The twin goutts of iridescent ions struck her shield; the tough armor ate as much of the damage as it could, only passing a little more than half through to smash at *Yen-Lo-Wang's* armor.

Danai rode the impacts and leaned around a rock outcropping, keeping *Yen-Lo-Wang* moving. She was not quite twice as fast as the *Lament* as long as she kept her myomers hot; in a bout with a heavier opponent that wouldn't likely be a problem. If anything, now her problem would be balance.

Triple-strength myomers were powerful, but all 'Mechs surrendered to heat eventually. If she kept running and firing her laser, *Yen-Lo-Wang* would shut down. And that would be the end of her.

Danai actually giggled; she had a lifetime of practice walking fine lines. One more, her heat gauge, would not be a problem. It never had been.

The *Lament* pilot did their best; they tried to put their back to the hall's high walls, but Danai was too fast. She circled the 'Mech, refusing to surrender the initiative, opening her shield to fire her Clan-built LRM 20 when she could. Soon the *Lament's* back and shoulders were peppered with missile impact damage; heavy burn scars had crippled its left arm.

Danai gasped in the heat, waiting for the laser to recharge, and stared at the zero indicator on her missile magazine; the *Lament* had absorbed all 120 missiles her 'Mech carried, and still it stood there, smoking and hobbled, but full of fight.

This was the moment Danai became serious; it always had been. She could see the end of the bout coming. *Yen-Lo-Wang* was burned and scarred, but still moving.

Her shield would survive enough hits for her to get in the final blows.

"Surrender," she sent in the clear. "You fought well, but we both know how this is going to end."

A harsh chuckle came back at her. "Fat lady ain't sung," the woman growled. "Figured you would have learned that all them years ago on the Game World."

"I learned to calculate the odds," Danai replied. "Yours don't look good."

"Lot of casinos be out of business if people played the odds," the RAF MechWarrior said. She struggled the *Lament* around to face *Yen-Lo-Wang*. "Besides. I put you down, maybe your lot leaves us alone."

"This doesn't have to go this way," Danai said, but she heard the determination the other woman's voice. She gripped her gunnery controls tight, fingers loose but ready. The tip of her tongue wet her upper lip, feeling the chapped skin there from her cockpit heat.

"Only one way it could go, once you tried to take our world from us."

"It was our world first."

The harsh chuckle returned. "It ain't the dirt, lady." The *Lament* shifted, gathering itself. "The people here now are Republic, through and through. They never been Capellans."

"The state is steward to us all," Danai whispered.

The *Lament* fired, a single PPC and a pair of extended-range medium lasers. Danai took the hits, feeling the shield finally shatter through the *Centurion's* frame, but it had done its job. She let it drop, exposing the empty LRM launcher, and burned at the *Lament* with her laser. The bolt struck the wasted left arm, burning impotently at the tatters of armor and structure. Danai gasped in the heat, even as *Yen-Lo-Wang's* DI computer hobbled the machine, erasing the speed gain the triple-strength myomer had given her.

"Okay," she whispered. Her laser did more harm than good now, so Danai did the only thing left.

She charged, raising the hatchet.

In her great-great-grandfather's time the hatchet had been claws, and Justin Allard had used them to literally gut the 'Mechs of his opponents in the Solaris arenas. She had chosen a more traditional hatchet for two reasons. First, because it was easier to use. Better reach, more leverage.

And second, because it could hit high or low.

Even hobbled by heat, *Yen-Lo-Wang* was as fast as the *Lament*. She closed the short range remaining between them almost immediately. At the last moment she sidestepped, lifting *Yen-Lo-Wang's* left foot over the angry kick the *Lament* pilot aimed at her, and swung the hatchet underhanded. The tungsten carbide-edged blade took the *Lament* in the shin, crushing armor plates and kicking the 'Mech's leg out from under it.

Already overbalanced by the missed kick, the *Lament* crashed to the ground.

It took Danai several steps to halt *Yen-Lo-Wang* and spin around; by that time the *Lament* MechWarrior had gotten

her 'Mech back on its feet and twisted to bring its heavy PPC to bear. The bolt took *Yen-Lo-Wang* low on the forearm, severing the actuators that had held up the shield.

Danai took up slack on the laser trigger, but held the shot. Her heat burden was still too high. Instead she pushed the steaming 'Mech into another run, hatchet raised.

The *Lament* came to meet her. There was nothing wrong with this MechWarrior's courage. Danai had met Warrior House members with less determination. This time, the Rep MechWarrior was too canny to kick; instead, she concentrated on getting the *Lament's* crippled arm up to block the descending hatchet. The blade struck with a ringing *clang*, all but amputating the limb at the elbow. *Yen-Lo-Wang's* shoulder glanced off the *Lament's* shoulder as she carried through past the 'Mech, but neither fell.

Danai spun immediately, eschewing distance, and swung the hatchet again. The blade bit deep into the *Lament's* right torso, crushing the remaining heavy PPC. The Rep burned at her 'Mech with her medium lasers, but *Yen-Lo-Wang* survived.

Danai ripped the hatchet out and swung again, but she was too slow. The *Lament*, still trying to find its footing, fell back out of the hatchet's reach. The blade cut only air.

"Bet they'd play that one over and over again on the fight circuits," the Rep MechWarrior gasped.

Danai ignored her. All this time, her heat sinks had been laboring to transfer heat to Hall's hot air. She'd already felt the unfettered power as the triple-strength myomer surged free of its restrictions. She raised the laser. She fired.

Blinding white light busts against the *Lament's* chest, eradicating the last of the armor there. The heart of the 'Mech, its huge 325-rated fusion engine and the rapidly-spinning gyro that gave it balance, were within reach.

She could literally cut the *Lament's* heart out.

"Give up," she growled.

"Go to hell."

"Fine." She lurched forward, hobbled again by heat, but still faster. She ignored the lasers that cut at her armor. She ignored the words the Rep MechWarrior was saying. She ignored the hobble *Yen-Lo-Wang* inherited when one of the Rep lasers nicked through its leg armor and tweaked her knee actuator.

She closed.

The hatchet came up. The *Lament* kicked, its heavy foot connecting with left leg and shattering most of the armor there.

The hatchet came down, right into the *Lament's* chest.

The *Lament's* gyro destroyed itself against the hatchet's hard alloy edge.

The *Lament* collapsed, helpless.

"I told you," Danai sent. She drew in a deep breath, fighting for air now that it was over—

—as the *Lament* thrashed around and tried to sweep her leg with its own.

"Come on," Danai muttered. She stepped back, leaned over, and burned a whole through the remains of the 'Mech's chest with her laser. The battered fusion engine assembly actually fell half-through the holes she'd blasted.

Without a heart, the *Lament* was finally still.

Danai relaxed again. Heat in her cockpit made the air shimmer over her controls; it would only be seconds before the heat sinks caught up, but they would be *long* seconds. She regarded the *Lament* beneath her, waiting to see if the Principes MechWarrior would come out of her cockpit.

After a minute of waiting, Danai got impatient. She kicked the wreckage in the leg.

The *Lament's* hatch opened; a wiry woman in a combat suit climbed out, looked down at the wreckage of her 'Mech, then pulled a set of sunglasses from a thigh pocket and put them on. Then she sat down, right there on the *Lament's* shoulder. She held her hands out as if to be cuffed.

"You got me," Danai heard, through her external microphones.

"I have your parole?" Danai asked. "You'll wait for my people to come collect you?"

The woman laughed. "Look around, lady," she said. "Where'm I gonna go?"

Danai rolled her eyes and turned *Yen-Lo-Wang* away.

Part of her, a big part, didn't care if the annoying woman was still there when her infantry arrived to take her captive.



One of the Yellow Jacket VTOLs that augmented her command lance found her first; the snub-nosed helicopter swept across the canyon, then twisted around to angle back.

"Zero, Zero Five, I have her!" Danai heard in her helmet. Then, "Six, wait one for retrans!" Then, after a brief squelch of static, Noah Capshaw's voice.

"*Sang-shao*, please remain where you are," the *sang-wei* said. Danai heard the tension in his voice, beneath the firm facade he projected.

"The rest of the raiding force?" Danai asked. She slowed her throttle, but didn't stop.

"If you got the *Lament*, all down," Capshaw said. He let of touch of reproach into his voice. "Five reports your armor looks a little beat up, *sang-shao*."

"Then they're all down," she said.

"Excellent. Please, stay there."

Danai grinned at Capshaw's concern after he closed the connection. She looked up in her HUD at the hovering Yellow Jacket. "Five, Zero Six," she sent.

"Five," came *Si-ben-bing* Bethany Chang's—the chopper pilot—laconic answer.

"Anything on your scanners?"

"Negative, Six."

"Keep an eye out?"

"That's affirm," Chang said.

"And send a squad to collect a prisoner," Danai said. She read off the coordinates of the downed *Lament*.

"Horst is on his way to babysit," Chang said, a moment later. Horst Ruhl piloted the other Yellow Jacket attached to her lance.

It was only a few minutes before Capshaw's *Wraith* fell out of the sky on its jump jets. The lithe, insectoid 'Mech stepped out of its landing crouch, looked around, then let its large pulse laser lower from its ready position. "With all due respect, *sang-shao*, your 'Mech looks like shit." He spoke on a discreet channel only the two of them could hear.

Danai chuckled. Noah Capshaw was coming along nicely; the hesitant boy she'd known on New Syrtis had really made strides in the last few months. "You should see the other guy."

"I have," Capshaw said.

"The rest of the lance?"

"On their way here," Capshaw said. "I also have a message from *Zhong-shao* Wu. He says to tell you it's not your job to put down enemy 'Mechs. It's your job to tell the rest of us to do it." Capshaw cleared his throat. "With all due respect."

"I'll take that under advisement," she said, this time stifling her chuckle.

"I don't think you understand, ma'am," Capshaw said diffidently. "This is *Danai's* Regiment. *Your* regiment. A hundred years ago it was Barton's Regiment, and Colonel Barton's XO was telling him the same thing at Fortress Bourgogne. You can't risk yourself like that."

"Noah—" she started, but he cut her off.

"Due respect, ma'am, your 'Mech isn't helping."

Danai's brows narrowed. "Now you're insulting *Yen-Lo-Wang*?"

"No ma'am. Its history is beyond reproach. But it also makes you stand out. It's a duelist's 'Mech, not a commander's."

Danai opened her mouth, and then closed it. Noah was right. All the way back to Justin Allard, *Yen-Lo-Wang* had been a 'Mech built for Solaris VII. Justin's son Kai had piloted *Yen-Lo-Wang* in service of the Federated Commonwealth, all but losing the 'Mech on Alyina, but he hadn't always fought *in* it.

"It's all I've known," she finally said. Then she shook her head. "Let's get back to base, *sang-wei*," she told Capshaw. "You've given me a lot to think about."



**POSITION/RANK**

FIRST LEUTNANT

AFFILIATION/UNITLYRAN COMMONWEALTH,
26TH ARCTURAN GUARDS**BIRTH YEAR**

3131

Born into House Carlyle of Odessa, Isobel was expected to join her family in the work of restoring their plague-ravaged world to its former greatness. The Blackout, falling on her first birthday, changed her destiny. Growing up amid news of spreading war and looming threats to the Commonwealth, Isobel rejected the pacifism of her parents. Instead, she sought to emulate her grandfather Alexander, a hero of the LAAF who narrowly escaped death on multiple occasions during the breakup of the Federated Commonwealth and the subsequent Jihad before retiring with honors and becoming Count of Odessa; and his parents, the famed mercenaries Grayson Death and Lori Kalmar Carlyle of the Gray Death Legion. She devoured every record of their exploits and made headbands and skull emblems an integral part of her attire. Learning that her grandfather had usually gone by Alex, she likewise shortened her name to "Bel."

Bel followed in the footsteps of her older brother Ronan and, over the objections of their parents, enrolled in the Coventry Military Academy in 3147,

where she excelled in both MechWarrior and anti-Mech infantry training programs, though she was disciplined in early 3148 for taking a squad of fellow cadets, calling themselves "Carlyle's Commandos," on unauthorized "field exercises" through the seedier sections of nearby Port Lawrence to break up a criminal kangaroo-rustling operation. Ronan, then on his senior internship at Coventry Metal Works, testified to her character before the disciplinary board, but in private chided her for trying to "play hero."

Her disciplinary hearing was interrupted by the arrival of Clan Jade Falcon, and Bel deployed with the Coventry Training Battalion to defend the academy against Delta Galaxy's attack. Enraged by news that elements of the First Falcon Striker Cluster had obliterated the town of Whitting, killed thousands of civilians, and torn down the monument to the Second Star League, Bel was authorized to lead her cadet company in a flanking attack on the Strikers' position in conjunction with kangaroo-mounted infantry from the militia. Primarily intended as a distraction during a major LCAF push against Falcon lines, Bel's cadet "Commandos" held the First Strikers' attention while the "boomer" infantry slipped through Falcon lines, using satchel charges to great effect and disabling nearly a Binary of Falcons before Bel's cadet company was forced to fall back. With the First Falcon Striker Cluster pulled off the front by the flank strike, the LCAF forces were able to compromise the Falcons' position, forcing Delta Galaxy to abandon its effort to eradicate the academy.

With the Falcon advance on the academy driven back, the surviving members of Bel's company deployed with the rest of the Training Battalion to relieve the Lyrans forces defending Coventry Metal Works' industriplex. Bel's Commandos arrived to find the Lyrans lines broken. Seeing Ronan's *Gauntlet* standing alone in the breach, trying to hold back several points of Falcon Elementals, Bel led her Commandos into the fray without hesitation, scattering the battle-armored troops and shoring up the Lyrans defenses. After the Falcons withdrew, Ronan thanked Bel for the rescue, acknowledging that she wasn't just playing hero anymore.

Bel was proud that she and Ronan survived the fighting at Coventry Metal Works, and even prouder to be able to join him in the ranks of the Twenty-sixth Arcturan Guards after she graduated from the academy with honors in 3150. As a newly commissioned LCAF first lieutenant, she serves, along with several of her former cadet Commandos, under Captain Ronan Carlyle in the Third Battalion's second company on Kandersteg. Bel takes exception when people call the company "Carlyle's Commandos," arguing that it is now properly "Carlyles' Commandos."

SHD-7H *SHADOW HAWK*

TYCHE

POWER PLANT HERMES 275 LIGHT

COMM SYSTEM NEIL 9000

T&T SYSTEM RCA INSTATRAC MARK XII

ARMOR MAXIMILLIAN 43 WITH CASE II

MASS 55 TONS

CHASSIS EARTHWERKS SHD II ENDO STEEL

ARMAMENT 1 IMPERATOR CODE RED LB
10-X AUTOCANNON

1 DIVERSE OPTICS EXTENDED-RANGE
MEDIUM LASER

1 HOLLY ENHANCED LRM 5 RACK

1 HOLLY SRM 2-PACK

CRUISING SPEED 54 KPH

MAXIMUM SPEED 86 KPH

JUMP JETS CHILTON 360

JUMP CAPACITY 150 METERS

Knowing the stories of Lori and Grayson Carlyle by heart, Bel had her heart set on piloting a *Shadow Hawk*, just as they did for more than three decades. Taking command of the Carlyles' ancestral 'Mech was out of the question, however, since *Boss Lady* had been destroyed on Glengarry in 3057.

In the Coventry Military Academy's MechWarrior program, most cadets familiarized themselves with factory-fresh Coventry Metal Works products, but Bel instead chose a Free Worlds League-made *Shadow Hawk* that had been acquired for cadets to train against. Naming it *Tyche* after the Greek goddess of fortune, luck and prosperity, Bel routinely devastated the other cadets' *Eisenfausts*, *Alfars*, and *Gauntlets* in field exercises.

The rugged -7H, a product of Nimakachi Fusion Products Limited's Lesnovo factory, echoed the classic -2H in both aesthetic styling and weapon loadout, albeit with technological upgrades across the board. *Tyche's* Imperator Code Red LB 10-X autocannon is twice as powerful, the Diverse Optics medium laser hits at longer ranges, and its Holly Enhanced long-range missile launcher remains dangerous even when enemies close in.

When the Jade Falcons attempted to destroy the academy as they had Whitting, Bel took to the field in *Tyche*, leading her squad of cadet "Commandos" in punishing mosquito strikes at the Falcon flanks, hitting from range before fading back behind the cover of the heavier 'Mechs' long wall. At the CMW indutriplex, she stormed into the midst of the Falcon Elementals, using *Tyche's* battlefists to crush several troopers scaling Ronan's OmniMech.

Upon graduation, Academy Kommandant Petra Kühn granted Bel permission to take *Tyche* with her to her new posting in the Twenty-sixth Arcturan Guards. On Kandersteg, *Tyche* can regularly be seen leading joint coordination exercises with elements of the RCT's infantry brigade in true Carlyle tradition.



ISOBEL 'BEL' CARLYLE

**POSITION/RANK**

BOUNTY HUNTER; MERCENARY

AFFILIATION/UNIT

UNKNOWN

BIRTH YEAR

UNKNOWN

Based on fragmentary evidence, Abdoun appears to have been born into a Kuritan family that was forcibly absorbed into the laborer caste after the Second Dominion/Combine War. Stripped of his identity, Abdoun's father, who claimed descent from an individual using the name Jade, nonetheless filled Abdoun's head with stories of his ancestors' role in the *Kokuryu-Kai*—the Black Dragon Society—and its governing Council of Gems. Learning of the suffering his lineage endured after its betrayal by House Kurita and the loss of its lands to the Clans, Abdoun grew up seeking a path to revenge and restoration.

Abdoun successfully tested into the Dominion's warrior caste and was trained in Clan warfare and doctrines, as demonstrated by his ability to hold his own against Clan foes, whether or not *zellbrigen* is observed. In the chaos following Gray Monday, Abdoun deserted from the Dominion with help from Black Dragon agents, bringing with him a supply of weaponry and transportation. The Society informed Abdoun that he was not only descended from Jade, but also from one of their greatest leaders—Ruby—the infamous Duke Hassid Ricol.

Abdoun was next spotted on Addicks in 3135 serving with Wyld's Jokers, piloting a blood-red *Bear Cub* bearing the crest of House Ricol. He disabled several Spirit Cat vehicles during the battle, but did not stay long with Jacob Bannson's sellswords. He offered his services as an independent mercenary and bounty hunter, sometimes hiring on with larger forces, sometimes hiring extra muscle for jobs that were too much for him alone. He appeared at the 3137 Battle of Marik in a red *Ghost*, again targeting Spirit Cat troops, and fought against Clan Wolf forces during the Marik-Stewart Commonwealth's final stand on Stewart in 3138. Crossing the Inner Sphere, he struck at Combine forces in the Draconis Reach, now piloting a custom *Marauder* painted to match the machine used by Duke Hassid Ricol. During the 3141-3142 Nova Cat Rebellion, Abdoun was responsible for the deaths of several senior field commanders in headhunting attacks against both sides. He continued to exact a fearsome toll on Combine forces when they invaded the Federated Suns. Once the Combine began to consolidate its gains, Abdoun reappeared in Wolf Empire territory, launching minor raids against Wolf and Jade Falcon garrisons.

Abdoun has shown a pattern of targeting the forces of House Kurita and of the Clans—the Nova Cats/Spirit Cats in particular, lending credence to the theory that he seeks revenge for the injuries those parties dealt to his ancestors and his benefactors in the *Kokuryu-kai*. Short of his capture and a proper genetic scan, his ancestry cannot be verified, but he has claimed the name of Ricol, proclaiming himself the House's last descendant, and has taken the title of *Akaryōshi*, or Red Hunter, following in Duke Hassid's footsteps. The Spirit Cats call him the Red Ronin, while Combine soldiers tell campfire tales of the *Aka Obake* (Red Ghost).

When facing Clan foes, Abdoun has developed a peculiar custom of taking defeated enemy warriors as bondsmen, placing a bondcord on their wrists, then immediately severing it and declaring them unworthy, keeping the bondcord for his collection. It has been theorized that he believes this will make these warriors, like him, exiles from Clan society, consigning them to the Dark Caste. Clan law does not recognize such a practice, but the reality of having been defeated and bonded by a renegade often prevents these warriors from returning to their former Clans.

While his actions seem directed by an all-consuming desire for revenge, those who have served with Abdoun describe him as cold and calculating, rather than ruthless.

MAD-7S MARAUDER [MODIFIED]

AKARYŌSHI

POWER PLANT GM 300 XL

MASS 75 TONS

CRUISING SPEED 43 KPH

COMM SYSTEM DALBAN MICRONICS

CHASSIS GM MARAUDER

MAXIMUM SPEED 64 KPH; 86 KPH WITH SUPERCHARGER

T&T SYSTEM DALBAN HIREZ

ARMAMENT 2 MAGNA FLARESTAR
SNUB-NOSE PPC WITH CAPACITORS

JUMP JETS NONE

ARMOR DURALLEX BALLISTIC-REINFORCED
WITH CASE II

2 CLAN TYPE 9-A ULTRA AUTOCANNON/10
1 CLAN SERIES 2F EXTENDED-RANGE
MEDIUM LASERS

JUMP CAPACITY NONE

First appearing in the Draconis Reach in 3138, *Akaryōshi* bears the red and black paint scheme and the House Ricol insignia made legendary by Duke Hassid Ricol in the early thirty-first century. While the chassis is clearly from a MAD-7S, it has been seen in different configurations with equipment and weapons customized for optimal mission performance, such as adding a supercharger or particle beam capacitors when superior speed or firepower are required. It is suspected that its pilot, Abdoun Ricol, employs the services of a well-equipped *Kokuryu-kai* technical team.

Akaryōshi most commonly sports snub-nosed PPCs, though its ClanTech autocannon can be fired in Ultra mode in place of the particle cannons when it needs to cool down. A pair of Clan ER medium lasers provides supporting firepower, while ballistic-reinforced armor makes the *Marauder* nigh-invulnerable to nearly anything but lasers and PPC fire.

On Avon in 3142, the beleaguered Nova Cat forces holding the Matabushi Incorporated plant at Fresno on the Albion continent initially rejoiced when scouts reported their DCMS foes in disarray. A lone *Marauder* had struck the Combine's rear area and vaporized the *tai-sa* and his command staff in their mobile headquarters. Mystic Tiber Rosse, however, clutched his head and howled in agony, proclaiming before collapsing that death

itself approached. When *Akaryōshi* appeared at the Matabushi defensive perimeter and issued a *batchall*, he handily defeated Star Colonel Arana Garr, killing her with an autocannon strike to the cockpit of her *Cave Lion*. Any debate over whether Rosse's vision referred to the Red Ronin or to the larger Combine threat is moot: no Nova Cats now remain to have that discussion.

On worlds up and down the Dragon's Tongue, DCMS commanders double their security detachments at the mere rumor that *Akaryōshi* has been sighted. Whether a true Ricol or not, the legacy of the Red Hunter continues.



ABDOUN RICOL



POSITION/RANK	KHAN
AFFILIATION/UNIT	WOLF EMPIRE
BIRTH YEAR	3111

Named for the Visigoth king who sundered the Roman Empire, Alaric was the product of Clan Wolf's experimental ironborn *sibko* created by order of Khan Vladimir Ward and overseen by his consort, Katherine Wolf (*nee* Steiner-Davion). While Alaric emulated Vlad's strength, cunning, intelligence, and courage, Katherine taught him her political acumen, deviousness, and ruthless insight—traits she passed to him along with her own DNA as his genemother. She guided his path, hoping to shape him into her weapon of vengeance against the Inner Sphere, but ultimately perished at his hands when he chose to follow his own destiny, free of her influence.

Every Clan *ristar* for a century has proclaimed that *they* will be the one to lead their people to glory as the ilClan, but Alaric, in considering the failure of Operation Revival and the Clans' stagnation during the Pax Republica, came to the realization that the way of the Clans was poorly suited to such

an endeavor. Rigid adherence to ritualized combat, bidding, and martial traditions that favor individual competitiveness and quick tactical reactions during the heat of combat could never result in the conquest of Terra, particularly given that the Inner Sphere had approached technological parity and adapted to Clan fighting styles. Clan Wolf, therefore, would have to evolve to claim its destiny.

Recruiting a cadre of independent thinkers, Alaric began planning for the future, looking not just two or three moves ahead in his strategies, but thinking in terms of decades. Traveling to Terra for the funeral of Paladin Victor Steiner-Davion in 3135, he used the opportunity to evaluate the other leaders present as potential allies and foes while reconnoitering future battlefields.

Convincing Khan Seth Ward of the need for progress, Alaric engineered the migration of the entire Wolf Clan to a new occupation zone straddling the Commonwealth/League border and distinguished himself in battles designed to misdirect potential foes as to the Clan's intentions. But Alaric was humbled by Anastasia Kerensky of the mercenary Wolf Hunters, who outmaneuvered and defeated the young warrior, then subjected him to torture before releasing him back to the Wolves. Kerensky's abuse taught Alaric the folly of overconfidence, helped him better know himself and his own weaknesses, and helped prepared him for the challenges ahead by teaching him the value of compassion—an emotion generally lacking in the Clans.

Reclaiming warrior status and his rank in battle against the Free Worlds League, Star Colonel Alaric defeated and bonded Anastasia then went on to crush the Lyran Commonwealth's best on Tharkad. Winning the Ward Bloodname, his achievements elevated him to succeed his slain Khan before he revealed his Steiner-Davion ancestry and claimed the title of Archon as well. Though legally baseless, due to the 3067 Act of Succession, the revelation reaped political rewards by giving the conquered Lyran worlds a path toward peacefully accepting him and their place in his Wolf Empire, forestalling insurgencies and freeing him to launch the final assault against the Republic of the Sphere.

Alaric now stands at Terra's threshold, and all of humanity holds its breath as it awaits the hour of the Wolf.

SAVAGE WOLF [A]

WEPWAWET

POWER PLANT MODEL 49B 375 XXL ENGINE

MASS 75 TONS

CRUISING SPEED 54 KPH

COMM SYSTEM KHAN SERIES (TYPE 6C)

CHASSIS TYPE W4 ENDO STEEL

MAXIMUM SPEED 86 KPH

T&T SYSTEM SERIES XIV OPT

ARMAMENT 2 SERIES 7K EXTENDED-RANGE

JUMP JETS NONE

ARMOR COMPOSITE ALPHA-V1
FERRO-LAMELLOR

LARGE LASERS

JUMP CAPACITY NONE

2 TYPE 9 SERIES ADVANCED TACTICAL
MISSILE SYSTEMS

4 CHI SERIES SMALL PULSE LASERS

Alaric is a strong believer in the power of symbols, particularly in Clan society. For his *Mad Cat Mk. IV* (*Savage Wolf*), Alaric chose the name *Wepwawet*, after the wolf-headed Egyptian god of war who was said to accompany the ancient pharaohs on hunts in soldier's garb, bearing mace and bow. Along the war-torn banks of the Nile, the deity symbolized the unification of the kingdom—exactly what Alaric intends with the Inner Sphere. The name means “opener of the ways,” and at *Wepwawet*'s helm, Alaric intends to break Devlin Stone's Fortress Wall and open Clan Wolf's path to Terra and its destiny as iClan.

Alaric's ferocity in battle is legendary, and in situations where deception is impossible, sheer savagery can turn certain defeat into brutal victory. Alaric's only failure on the battlefield came at Anastasia Kerensky's hands, and he revenged himself on her, pitting *Wepwawet* against her own *Savage Wolf*, called *Omega*, and emerging victorious.

Preferring one of the OmniMech's ER large laser configurations, Alaric frequently burns his foes to ash in their cockpits as a warning to future opponents that to challenge him is to court death. The 'Mech's exceptional speed for its weight class gives Alaric the flexibility and adaptability that have been his hallmark on the battlefield.

Alaric is venerated by the Wolf *touman*, and his efforts to step up production have made the *Savage Wolf* one of Clan Wolf's favored machines. The sleek, rounded cockpit and back-bent legs have become a common sight in the Empire, where, even at rest, they crouch as though eager for battle.



ALARIC WARD

**POSITION/RANK**

SANG-SHAO (CAPELLAN CONFEDERATION ARMED FORCES); DUCHESS OF CASTROVIA

AFFILIATION/UNIT

CAPELLAN CONFEDERATION

BIRTH YEAR

3108

Sang-shao Danai Liao-Centrella began her life believing she was the third child of Sun-Tzu Liao, the most successful chancellor the Capellan Confederation had produced in centuries. The reality, that she was the product of incest between her “brother” Daoshen and “sister” Ilse Centrella-Liao, was revealed to her near her thirtieth birthday.

It is a trauma that she struggles with to this day. Very few people know the truth, and it is a secret Danai keeps as tightly as any.

When she was nineteen, Danai, anxious to be out from the shadow of her more powerful “siblings,” journeyed to Solaris VII to fight in the games piloting perhaps the most famous BattleMech in the Inner Sphere, Kai Allard-Liao’s *Yen-Lo-Wang*. She fought her way into the Grand Tournament, winning four matches before falling, but was ultimately recalled to serve in the Capellan Confederation Armed Forces as an officer in the Second McCarron’s Armored Cavalry.

Since then, as the Inner Sphere fell back into to warfare following Gray Monday, Danai has made a name for herself. She travelled to Terra for Victor Steiner-Davion’s funeral, where she met Caleb Davion, heir to the throne of the Federated Suns. The two quickly formed a flirtatious relationship that they carried on even after realizing who one another were. They both knew the relationship could go nowhere—or at least Danai did. She discovered Caleb had other plans, when he raped her in the wilds of New Hessen.

The injuries Danai has sustained to her self-image have given her a mild case of post-traumatic stress disorder. Though she has largely learned to control it, her PTSD manifests often in outbursts of emotion, hypervigilance, and an obsessive need to control the details of her personal space. She has wisely kept this need from transferring to her military duties, but they still manifest from time to time.

Since then Danai has become a powerful woman, driven by an almost obsessive need to excel at whatever she does. She rose to command the Second McCarron’s Armored Cavalry during the border wars with the Federated Suns, twice fighting Julian Davion and twice negotiating peace. She nearly killed the Davion prince on New Syrtis, before withdrawing to marshal the Confederation against the Republic.

After New Syrtis, Danai was named Duchess of Castrovia, a world often held by the heir to the Capellan Chancellorship. She also made the acquaintance of the late Lady Wilhelmina Liao, of the Capella Liao, who taught her the duties of being a member of the *Sheng* nobility.

When the Fortress Republic wall came down, she led her regiment and others to the Republic world of Hall, where she destroyed the defending battalions of the Fourteenth Principes Guards and established a nascent Capellan government. Afterward, she helped reclaim Liberty before being recalled to Confederation space.

As a MechWarrior, Danai has few equals; most attribute her failure to win the Grand Championship on Solaris to inexperience at the time, not lack of skill. Though she now moves in larger circles than a ‘Mech gladiator, the skills of presentation and self-control she learned on Solaris are holding her in good stead. She has become the de facto, if not stated, successor of her “brother” Daoshen Liao, and the experience she has gained integrating former Republic worlds into the Confederation is preparing her well for the eventual duties of the Chancellorship.

BL-18-KNT *BLACK KNIGHT*

JULIAN

POWER PLANT	VLAR 300 LIGHT	MASS	75 TONS	CRUISING SPEED	43 KPH
COMM SYSTEM	TRANSCOMM ALPHA	CHASSIS	TECHNICRON REVISED NT ENDO-COMPOSITE	MAXIMUM SPEED	64 KPH
T&T SYSTEM	TRANSCOMM BETA WITH BEAGLE ACTIVE PROBE AND TARGETING COMPUTER	ARMAMENT	1 CLAN TYPE DDS "KINGSTON" EXTENDED-RANGE PPC	JUMP JETS	NONE
ARMOR	VALIANT LAMELLOR		2 CLAN SERIES 7NC EXTENDED-RANGE LARGE LASERS	JUMP CAPACITY	NONE
			4 CLAN SERIES 2NC EXTENDED-RANGE MEDIUM LASERS		
			1 CLAN SERIES 4C SMALL PULSE LASER		

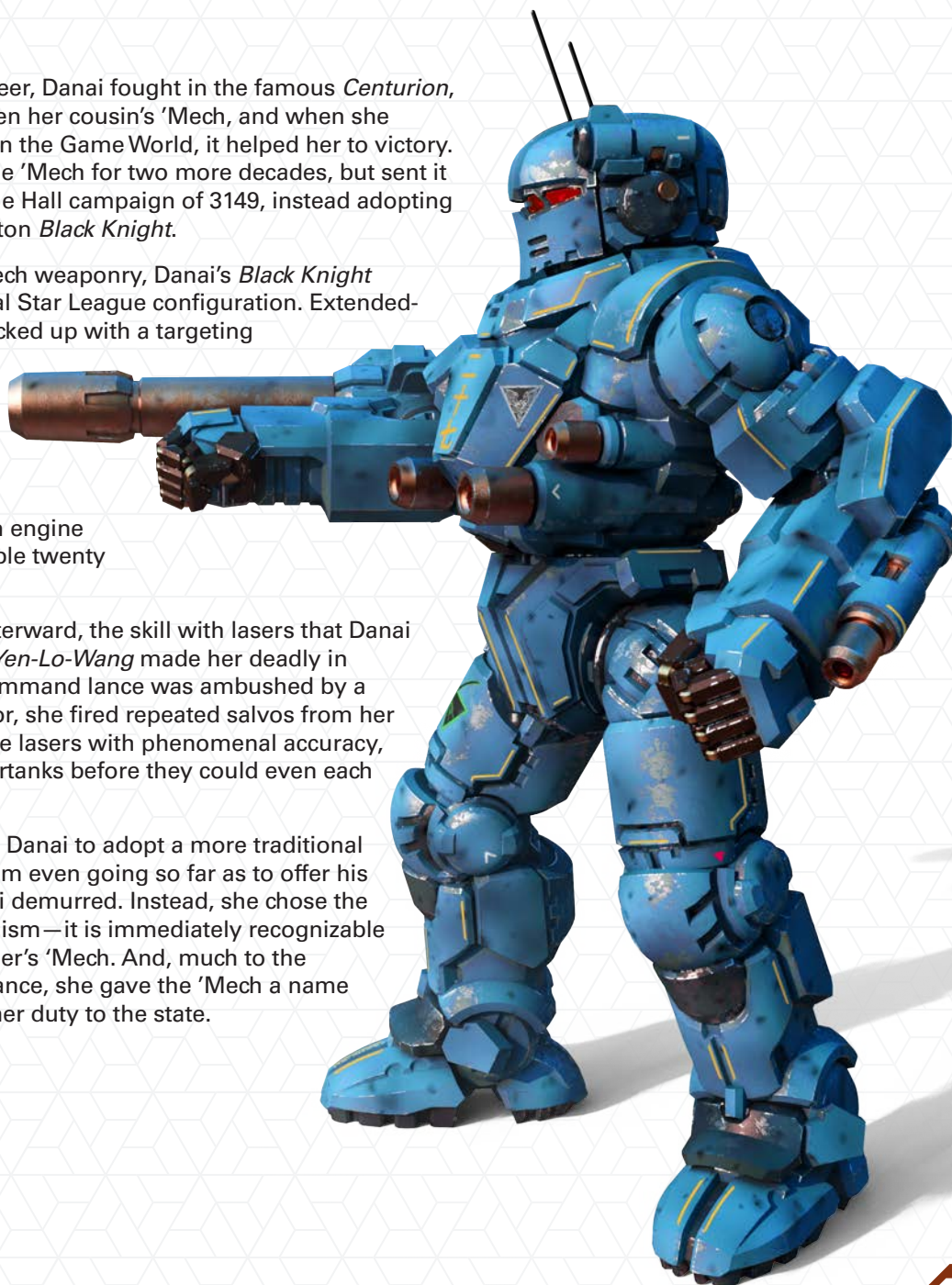
For almost her entire career, Danai fought in the famous *Centurion, Yen-Lo-Wang*. It had been her cousin's 'Mech, and when she followed in his footsteps on the GameWorld, it helped her to victory. She piloted the duelist-style 'Mech for two more decades, but sent it back to Kai's family after the Hall campaign of 3149, instead adopting a newly built seventy-five-ton *Black Knight*.

Fully kitted out with ClanTech weaponry, Danai's *Black Knight* harkens back to the original Star League configuration. Extended-range energy weapons backed up with a targeting computer make the 'Mech an assassin on the battlefield, but Danai chose it primarily for its utility as a command vehicle. Endo-composite structure and a light fusion engine allow it to carry an incredible twenty double heat sinks.

In action on Liberty and afterward, the skill with lasers that Danai learned at the controls of *Yen-Lo-Wang* made her deadly in her new ride. When her command lance was ambushed by a company of Republic armor, she fired repeated salvos from her ER PPC and pair of ER large lasers with phenomenal accuracy, crippling three Zibler hovortanks before they could even each engagement range.

Many of her officers urged Danai to adopt a more traditional Capellan 'Mech, one of them even going so far as to offer his own *Tian-zhong*, but Danai demurred. Instead, she chose the *Black Knight* for its symbolism—it is immediately recognizable on the field as a commander's 'Mech. And, much to the chagrin of her command lance, she gave the 'Mech a name that would remind her of her duty to the state.

She named it *Julian*.



DANAI LIAO-CENTRELLA

**POSITION/RANK**

LEFTENANT GENERAL (AFFS),
PRINCE'S CHAMPION, FIRST PRINCE

AFFILIATION/UNIT

FEDERATED SUNS

BIRTH YEAR

3107

The grandson of Jackson Davion, Julian has the same reddish-blond hair, strong chin, hazel eyes and square shoulders as his father, Christoffer, the elected Chairman of Argyle. Having learned from Jackson's unfortunate support for Katherine in the Steiner-Davion civil war, Christoffer taught Julian that men choose how to live their own lives, and stand straighter when not carrying lies on their backs or dishonor in their hearts. Julian was only thirteen when Christoffer died, and the remainder of his upbringing was seen to by Amanda Hasek and First Prince Harrison Davion, with whom Julian developed a father-son relationship.

Julian graduated the New Avalon Military Academy and became the youngest Prince's Champion in the history of the Federated Suns. Assigned to the First Davion Guards on the basis of his heritage, rather than having earned it, he overcame the unit's lack of respect and general morale issues by giving the men his unrequited commitment, personally taking a hand in maintenance, support, and other grunt-work tasks, teaching the men through his example

to take pride in their equipment and martial heritage. Under his guidance, the unit became one of the most prestigious and effective formations in the AFFS.

Dismissed as Prince's Champion and exiled by his unwell cousin, Caleb, after Harrison's death, Julian continued to carry out Harrison's last orders—to support the Republic—and assembled a coalition of young leaders from across the Inner Sphere to fight the Senatorial Alliance on Terra and Ronel. Having learned from Harrison that battles are won in the planning stage, Julian proved himself an able and highly adaptable battlefield commander, and a natural leader.

Seeking a cause worth fighting for after having been abandoned by both the Federated Suns and the Republic of the Sphere, Julian first protected Republic worlds outside the Fortress Wall, then joined the defense of the Lyrn Commonwealth against Clan Jade Falcon and the Wolf Empire. Upon the death of the First Prince Caleb, Julian's exile ended and he was proclaimed the new First Prince. Never having desired such responsibility, Julian only wanted to serve the leaders and people of the realm. Secret data provided by Gavin Marik-Davion proved that Harrison had known about Caleb's schizophrenia and had been grooming Julian to be his heir and lead the Federated Suns.

Determined to return and defend his homeland against simultaneous attacks from its ancient foes, the Draconis Combine and the Capellan Confederation, Julian gathered support from mercenaries, Clan Sea Fox and, after a surprise invitation through the Fortress Wall, from Devlin Stone, with whom he signed a covenant of mutual support. He led a task force to blunt the Capellan advance and liberate the Capellan March capital of New Syrtis, ultimately negotiating an armistice with Daoshen Liao. When the Fortress Wall came down, Stone's forces made good on his promise, destabilizing Combine garrisons along the border and liberating Robinson.

With both March capitals restored, Julian still faces the task of keeping his realm's economy running and liberating the capital world of New Avalon. Not to mention the still looming question of when Stone will call on Julian to make good on the covenant and send aid to Terra when the Republic faces the final battle for its existence.

In combat, Julian has shown the ability to make hard decisions with his men's lives, drawing a line and declaring "no further," then sacrificing parts of his command strategically to ensure that the enemy pays a much higher price. The question remains—will he be willing to draw the line and risk sacrificing the future of the Federated Suns to keep his word to Stone's Republic?

MAD-10D MARAUDER II

EXCALIBUR

POWER PLANT	GM SUPERLOAD 400 XL
COMM SYSTEM	DALBAN MICRONICS
T&T SYSTEM	DALBAN HIREZ II
ARMOR	VALIANT LAMELLOR

MASS	100 TONS
CHASSIS	GM MAD II ENDO-COMPOSITE
ARMAMENT	2 EXOSTAR PINNACLE (CLANTECH) EXTENDED-RANGE PPC 2 EXOSTAR MEDIUM X-PULSE LASERS 1 CHISCOMP 87 LARGE RE-ENGINEERED LASER

CRUISING SPEED	43 KPH
MAXIMUM SPEED	64 KPH
JUMP JETS	CHILTON 600
JUMP CAPACITY	120 METERS

An accomplished MechWarrior, Julian has proven himself a fearsome opponent in a variety of BattleMechs, including an *Enforcer III* named *Damocles* and a *Templar III* named *Arthur* that was destroyed on New Syrtis, costing Julian his leg. Despite his injury, Julian soon took the field in a new MAD-10D *Marauder II*, which he named *Excalibur*. A superior command vehicle, it allows the still-recovering First Prince to direct his troops in the fight for their realm's very survival.

Less heroically, the last time Julian piloted a *Marauder II* was as an exchange student on Tharkad in the company of the wild and unpredictable Callandre "Calamity" Kell, where the two became fast friends ("co-conspirators," per the official charges) and were briefly romantically involved. A rapidly escalating series of hijinks culminated in the two Nagelring cadets hotwiring a *Zeus* and a *Marauder II* and taking them for a drunken joyride through Tharkad City during a howling blizzard.

By itself, that would not have been grounds for severe disciplinary action. However, as Callandre was privy to secret details about the construction of the palace, given her family's close historical ties to the ruling Steiner line, she and Julian penetrated security and brought their BattleMechs into the throne room, where they toppled the *Griffins* flanking the Archon's seat and positioned their 'Mechs (his emblazoned with the words *Family Jules*, hers with *Red Delta*) in what the honor board records described as "compromising poses

of a vulgar nature" atop the ceremonial guardians, doing 500,000 kroner in damage to the 'Mechs and the palace in the process.

Archon Melissa Steiner, livid, expelled Julian from the Lyran Commonwealth and the honor board voided the cadets' academic credits (delaying their graduation to 3130), while suspending student exchanges with the Federated Suns for the next three years.



JULIAN DAVION

**POSITION/RANK**

MYSTIC

AFFILIATION/UNIT

CLAN NOVA CAT

BIRTH YEAR

3116

The Clans are renowned for their harsh training, which begins in a creche and ends only when cadets have washed out of their *sibkos* or claimed a place in the warrior caste. Yet even these methods pale next to the horrific brutality meted out upon the few children bred for Clan Nova Cat's secretive mystic caste, a program forged with the help of the Combine's Order of the Five Pillars. Testing for the mystic caste started before the age of five, and involved every physical and psychological pressure available, including sensory deprivation chambers. The trials were intended to awake the candidates' mystic potential of "hyperanalytical conjecture, with quasi-quantum mathematical sequencing and genengineered superlative observance acuity." Test subjects lacking this potential were often driven insane or killed.

Worshiped by some as holy warriors, loathed by others as abominations, Kisho Nova Cat bears the awesome weight of the mantle of mystic with calm assurance and a ruthless dedication. It is a calling he was literally crafted to embrace. But it was not always so.

Kisho passed his Trial of Mysticism in 3129. For the very first time, however, it was not a single warrior that passed—or none, as often occurred—but three. Along

with Kisho, Tanaka and Hisa would form a triumvirate of rising mystic caste power. However, Kisho harbored a secret: unlike his fellow castemates, he doubted, using subterfuge to appease expectations. That self-doubt and hatred increasingly poisoned his world view, save for Hisa, who remained his only anchor.

Much larger events intruded when *Tai-shu* Katana Tormark arrived on Irece to gain Nova Cat aid in reconquering previous Combine worlds ceded to the Republic of the Sphere decades before. Much to Kisho's shock, Katana presented documents to Khan Jacali Nostra that secured the contract of a Galaxy. And Kisho—along with Hisa and Tanaka—would join her campaign.

Kisho further received a mandate from Oathmaster Kanaye: the descendants of the Nova Cats who joined in the formation of the Republic a half-century earlier were invited to come home. These Spirit Cats were already embroiled in conflicts across the Republic, however, and refused to leave their commitments. Soon the Nova Cats joined the raging war. Kisho found his charade pushed to the limits, as he fought a battle within every bit as vicious as that without.

His path from doubt to belief was forged at this time, fueled by too many preternatural moments in combat that saved his life and turned the tide of battle to ignore. The soul-wrenching assassination of both Hisa and Tanaka furthered that tempering, while the strongest Vision he'd yet received quenched doubts and forced him to declare a Trial of Annihilation against the Spirit Cats. As this chapter of his life closed, a portion of the remaining Spirit Cats chose to follow him, and he allowed that burden with a true acceptance of his abilities.

However, Kisho's testing was far from complete. Following the successful conquest of Republic worlds, the Draconis Combine became embroiled in a new war with the Federated Suns. In that moment of perceived weakness, Khan Nostra unleashed her warriors in a bid for freedom from the Combine. Their rage at containment on reservations for long decades boiled over, and they fought with abandon but to no avail as the Dragon seemed to anticipate their every move. Nova Cat Galaxy after Galaxy fell, world after world. Khan Nostra's burning desire for freedom had destroyed her Clan.

Oathmaster Kanaye, at this desperate hour, proposed a desperate plan. In the months before the inevitable assault on the Nova Cats' final stronghold on Irece, a holistic slice of Clan Nova Cat—with a complete scientific and technical database, along with samples of their entire Bloodname genetic legacy—would be given to Kisho, with orders to flee. Though horrified, Kisho once more accepted a terrible burden. As 3142 ended, so too did Clan Nova Cat's time with the Dragon, with the Clan utterly eradicated from Combine worlds, including the use of a nuclear device on their genetic repository. Kisho led a ragtag group of thousands of Nova Cat refugees into hiding, his whereabouts still unknown.

WENDIGO-VP [PRIME]

NEBULA

POWER PLANT 250 CONSOLIDATED XL FUSION

MASS 50 TONS

CRUISING SPEED 54 KPH

COMM SYSTEM KHAN SERIES (TYPE 6C)

CHASSIS MYNX TYPE MEDIUM ENDO STEEL

MAXIMUM SPEED 86 KPH

T&T SYSTEM SERIES XIV OPT

ARMAMENT 1 RIPPER SERIES A1 EXTENDED RANGE PPC

JUMP JETS NORTHROP STARLIFTERS
M50S STANDARD JUMP JETS

ARMOR GAMMA SPECIAL REFLECTIVE

1 TYPE KOV LB-10X AUTOCANNON

JUMP CAPACITY 120 METERS

2 SERIES 14NC MEDIUM PULSE LASERS

1 SERIES 1NC EXTENDED RANGE SMALL LASER

Kisho's *Wendigo*, which he named *Nebula*, was literally the first of its kind off of the assembly line as he entered the war in the Republic alongside Katana Tormark. Though Kisho took an untested prototype into battle, a more refined OmniMech would eventually appear.

The *Wendigo* had its birth in the *Avalanche* OmniMech. A joint project between the Draconis Combine's Luthien Armor Works and the Nova Cats' scientist caste, the *Avalanche* would languish for literally decades—endlessly suspicious of each other's motives—created unnecessary road blocks. The final design of the *Avalanche*, when it finally appeared on battlefields, contained numerous flaws.

The *Wendigo* attempted to redress those deficiencies. With a max speed of ninety-seven kilometers, it can admirably maneuver across any battlefield and its structural components, control systems, and armor protection were all cutting edge. Kisho's *Nebula* was the first of a variant prototype run that used a smaller engine that propelled it at the same speed as its predecessor. This enabled him to field an increased payload centered around an LB 10-X autocannon and ER PPC, backed up by two medium pulse lasers and an extended-range small laser, along with four jump jets.

Nebula served Kisho well for long years of brutal conflict. Strangely, it was discovered abandoned amid a scene of terrible fighting on the backwater world of Almunge in late 3147. The ISF swarmed the entire region when the remains were identified as Kisho's 'Mech;

by this time the Combine was aware Kisho and an unknown number of his Clansmen escaped the Nova Cats' destruction on Irece. Additional evidence has since been uncovered by at least one other intelligence agency—though not the ISF—that implicates the O5P in providing significant aid to their disappearance.



KISHO NOVA CAT



POSITION/RANK	SAKHAN (SPINA KHANATE)
AFFILIATION/UNIT	CLAN SEA FOX
BIRTH YEAR	3094

The Great Houses still eye the Clans as dangerous predators in their midst. For a century, they've attempted to dislodge them from their doorstep. While some have fallen, five still garner banner headlines in holovid news broadcasts each year as their actions control hundreds of worlds and billions of lives.

But a sixth Clan flourishes in the rich waters of the Inner Sphere, with tentacles that reach into every empire. While all the Clans have changed since the days of Operation Revival, none have so thoroughly embraced a new vision beyond the Founder's sight as Clan Sea Fox.

Always a Clan with mercantile leanings, the Diamond Sharks ruthlessly reformed their identity into merchants par excellence when they reclaimed their original totem as Clan Sea Fox in 3100. The Clan evolved into a nearly pure spacefaring society, divided into five Khanates each consisting of five Aimags: a flotilla of associated JumpShips and DropShips that spread out from their central CargoShips and ArcShips in a region of space. Lest any believe the Clan has lost its teeth, its *touman* is

always prepared to give literal meaning to the term "hostile takeover."

Such a radical transformation allowed the Sea Fox to grow in new waters, and caused others to consistently underestimate their power and influence. The life of saKhan Petr Kalasa of Spina Khanate has followed a similar arc, from the vigorous victories of youth, to the fall from a position of power, to a reinvention to once more stand at the pinnacle of leadership.

Born into Skate Khanate on Trondheim—one of only three worlds wholly controlled by the Sea Foxes—Petr did not initially stand out. However, he gained significant notice during his Trial of Commerce; the deal he forged involving integrated network services was so lucrative, it opened up a pathway for him to gain a Kalasa Bloodname. Moreover, saKhan Mikel Sennet declared a Trial of Possession for the upstart merchant, bringing him into the Spina Khanate fold.

Petr's star continued to rise as he became ovKhan of Delta Aimag and started a legendary rivalry with Sha Clarke of Beta Aimag. This rivalry culminated in Petr's greatest failure, leaving him terribly scarred and costing him a lucrative new contract. Haunted by that failure, he embraced the scars as debts to pay. Having formed an unlikely friendship with an ex-Republic intelligence officer, Snow, Petr ultimately discovered Sha conspiring with Clan Jade Falcon to assassinate Khan Hawker. Foiling the plot re-energized Petr and set him back on a course of success.

In 3136 Petr accepted a contract to transport the Spirit Cats to the world of Marik. Several years of expert maneuvering through the currents of conflicting rivalries cemented his leadership, and he was instrumental in the formation of the seven-world Clan Protectorate in 3138, with the planet of Marik as a new clearinghouse world for Clan Sea Fox. He and the Spirit Cat forces of the Protectorate also aided Captain-General Jessica Marik of the Oriente Protectorate in the assault on Atreus, and Petr stood as one of several witnesses to the installation of Jessica Marik as leader of a reunified Free Worlds League. As the decade ended, Petr succeeded Mikel Sennet as saKhan of Spina Khanate.

Despite the winds of war swirling around the Inner Sphere, the past decade appeared outwardly quiet for Petr, as he focused on defense of the Clan Protectorate. However, such surface tranquility belied the strong currents running deep. Petr called upon the favor owed to him by Snow, along with the connections forged by having helped place Jessica on the throne of the League, to complete a years-long undermining of ComStar that eventually lead to Clan Sea Fox's complete acquisition of all their assets within the Free Worlds League. A titanic maneuver that required machinations by nearly all of Clan Sea Fox's leadership, saKhan Kalasa's crucial role in closing the deal has many eying him for the Khanship.

HAMMERHEAD

POWER PLANT	FIREBOX 270 XL
COMM SYSTEM	COMSET 1
T&T SYSTEM	DTRAC SUITE 4
ARMOR	DOUBLE-FORGED ZX20 HARDENED

MASS	45 TONS
CHASSIS	SFAM ENDO STEEL
ARMAMENT	1 SERIES 44H LARGE PULSE LASER
	1 SERIES 2B EXTENDED RANGE MEDIUM LASER
	1 TYPE VI SRM 6 STREAK LAUNCHER

AKITLA

CRUISING SPEED	64 KPH
MAXIMUM SPEED	86 KPH
JUMP JETS	NONE
JUMP CAPACITY	NONE

The *Hammerhead* was designed with one paramount philosophy: never get knocked off your feet. The 'Mech's legs were manufactured to be overly large, with a wide footprint and stance. That design sensibility was accentuated with the use of the Actuator Enhancement System, giving the pilot nearly preternatural abilities to stay on their

feet. The combination of massive slabs of hardened armor along with such powerful grace has created an unusual 'Mech. Despite boasting light weaponry for its forty-five tons—the *Hammerhead* packs a mere large pulse laser, extended-range medium laser and Streak SRM 6—its capabilities keep opponents on their toes. Significant orders for the 'Mech have been received from across the Clans, vaulting the *Hammerhead* quickly into the spotlight of the modern battlefield.

SaKhan Petr Kalasa acquired his *Hammerhead*—which he named *Akitla*—after he lost his *Tiburon* in battle on Marik in 3147. After half a year of an economic interdiction against Regulus, the Regulans struck back in an attempt to disrupt Sea Fox pressure. While the majority of the fighting fell to the Spirit Cats, Petr lead a small contingent of warriors in a flanking maneuver. When some of the Regular forces discovered the saKhan of the Protectorate was in the field, they threw caution to the wind and attacked with abandon, and Petr barely escaped with his life.



PETR KALASA



POSITION/RANK	CAPTAIN (FREE WORLDS LEAGUE MILITARY)
AFFILIATION/UNIT	FREE WORLDS LEAGUE
BIRTH YEAR	3119

The way his siblings tell it, Trenton Augustus Albert Marik emerged from Baroness Philippa Marik's womb ready to defend the whole Marik-Stewart Commonwealth by himself. Even when he was a young child, he repeatedly shielded his taller and elder brother Simon and his younger sister Augustine from schoolyard bullies, often getting into fights to protect friends and family. This trend continued into finishing school, when he employed his fierce, personable charm to disarm would-be bullies, and whenever that failed, relied on his smaller-than-average stature and quick reflexes to make fools of those who relied on rage and brute strength to achieve their ends.

Trenton's penchant for standing up for those unable to defend themselves led him to pursue an interest in a legal career, but longstanding tradition in the Marik family dictated he enroll in military training and serve at least one tour of duty before embarking on a different career path. In 3136, when Trenton had to choose which military academy to attend, his uncle

Anson Marik, Captain-General of the Marik-Stewart Commonwealth, advised him to avoid matriculating to the Allison MechWarrior Institute on New Olympia, as the encroachment of Clan Wolf and the Lyran Commonwealth made the planet a potential trouble spot. Trenton demurred, arguing that, apart from a few notable exceptions such as Janos Marik, it was longstanding House Marik tradition to attend AMI. He enrolled at Allison, and made it known to the academy's commandant that he wanted no special dispensation or treatment while attending, regardless of his family name. Within his first few weeks, he received special treatment anyway, and threatened to drop out over the whole affair. To avoid the PR nightmare of a House Marik scion publicly dropping out of the academy, the commandant went so far as to change Trenton's surname on the roster to "Johns" at his request, to avoid any administrative bias.

When Anson was killed in battle with invading Clan Wolf forces on Stewart in mid-3138 and the Marik-Stewart Commonwealth began to collapse, Trenton knew it would only be a matter of time before the Wolves reached New Olympia. His fears came true in September 3139, less than a year ahead of his expected graduation, and Trenton was the first third-year cadet to volunteer to defend cadets and civilians unable to evacuate in the first wave. Alongside AMI instructors, he helped cover the students' escape and assumed temporary command of the defense when several key instructors were killed in the battle.

Thanks to Captain-General Jessica Marik's clemency and benevolence following the collapse of the Mark-Stewart Commonwealth and the reunion of the Free Worlds League under her leadership, Trenton was granted special permission to finish out his final year of MechWarrior training at the Princefield Military Academy. It was there on Oriente that he struck up a lasting friendship with Count Gavin Stewart and his sister, Adamina, who would go on to become Warden-General Nikol Marik's personal aide. Following graduation, Trenton requested a lieutenant's billet in the Free Worlds League Military, just like any other MechWarrior-academy graduate; however, given his prowess and courage in the evacuation of New Olympia in addition to his House Marik blood, Jessica gave him a captain's billet in the First Free Worlds Guards, a former Army of the Marik-Stewart Commonwealth regiment, which allowed him to serve alongside many soldiers he had known growing up. Jessica's trust was not misplaced, for Trenton has since earned his company's respect and proven to be a capable leader. Given his integral status in the regiment and his potential for career advancement, he has put his dream of a legal career on indefinite hold.

RFL-7N2 RIFLEMAN [MODIFIED]

HABEAS CORPUS

POWER PLANT	HERMES 240 XL	MASS	60 TONS	CRUISING SPEED	43 KPH
COMM SYSTEM	GARRET T11-A	CHASSIS	KALLON TYPE IX ENDO STEEL	MAXIMUM SPEED	64 KPH
T&T SYSTEM	GARRET D2J	ARMAMENT	2 ORIENTE MODEL O LB 10-X AUTOCANNON	JUMP JETS	NONE
ARMOR	KALLON ROYALSTAR WITH CASE II		2 CERES ARMS STRIKER LIGHT PPCS	JUMP CAPACITY	NONE

While fellow AMI MechWarrior students had to make do with piloting the school's training 'Mechs, Trenton received a gift from his overly worried uncle: a brand-new RFL-7N2 *Rifleman* equipped with the latest technologies available to the Army of the Marik-Stewart Commonwealth. Since many of Trenton's new academy friends were children of Dispossessed MechWarriors, Anson's gift laden him with embarrassment and guilt, in addition to threatening to expose his true heritage to his peers. In solidarity with his friends, Trenton opted to leave the 'Mech in storage and instead use a trainer *Rifleman* provided by the school for exercises.

When Clan Wolf's Beta Galaxy invaded New Olympia in 3139, Trenton had initially planned to fight the Wolves in the same trainer 'Mech he always used, but a Wolf aerospace bombing run collapsed the hangar housing the 'Mech before he could reach it. This forced him to fire up the undamaged *Rifleman* Anson had given him, which, unlike the gray-primer academy 'Mechs, was painted in colors matching the First Free Worlds Guards, the premier regiment of the AMSC. At the controls of his *Rifleman*, Trenton shot down several Wolf aerofighters before the academy's commandant ordered him to fall back. Trenton refused, and fought alongside the commandant until his autocannon magazine ran dry. Only upon the commandant's death did he deign to withdraw to the last DropShips departing the planet.

Trenton christened the 'Mech *Habeas Corpus*, as a nod to his initial ambitions toward being a barrister, and modified it by exchanging the lasers for additional armor and a larger autocannon magazine. Instead of

employing the traditional Free Worlds Guards parade scheme, *Habeas Corpus* is painted Marik purple with white accents, to honor the memory of the Marik-Stewart Commonwealth and the fallen soldiers of the decommissioned ASMC.



TRENTON MARIK

BATTLETECHTM LEGENDSTM

